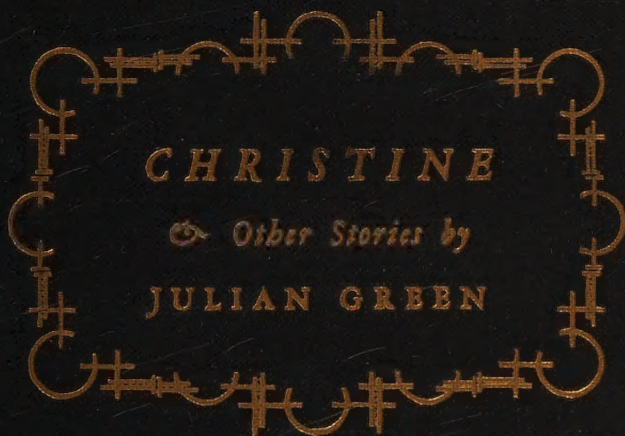




CHRISTINE

& Other Stories by

JULIAN GREEN



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The Extraordinary Career of JULIAN GREEN

He was born in Paris, September, 1900, of American parents.

He drove an ambulance on the French and Italian Fronts in 1917.

The following year he joined the French Artillery.

He entered the University of Virginia in 1919 and spent two years there.

His first novel, *Avarice House*, won universal praise in both France and America.

His second novel, *The Closed Garden*, won the Femina-Bookman Prize in Europe for the most distinguished novel of the year. It was crowned by the French Academy. It was selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club in America, and became an immediate best-seller on two continents.

His third novel, *The Dark Journey*, was chosen by the Selection Sequana in France* (The French Book-of-the-Month Club) where it has raised a storm of controversy and has gone through fifteen printings. And it has been awarded the \$10,000 Prize in the Harper Prize Novel Contest for 1929-30.

Julian Green's record of distinction is unique. Critics in France and America call him "the best of his generation." He has been compared most frequently to Flaubert, Emily Brontë, Balzac, Conrad. He is unquestionably one of the most important living American writers.

Books by
JULIAN GREEN

THE PILGRIM ON THE EARTH

THE CLOSED GARDEN

THE DARK JOURNEY

SUITE ANGLAISE

AVARICE HOUSE

CHRISTINE



CHRISTINE

AND OTHER STORIES

By Julian Green

Translated from the French by

COURTNEY BRUERTON



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

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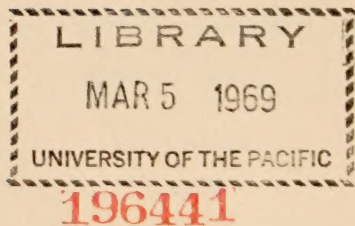
1930

CHRISTINE, and Other Stories

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FIRST EDITION

B-E



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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

IT is unusual for a young man, beginning to write at the age of twenty-four, to publish by the time he is twenty-seven two short stories, four articles, two long stories, and two novels; it is remarkable when the novels provoke among the critics a practically unanimous enthusiasm; and it is a thing unique in French literary history when this happens to an American writing in French. Two Americans, both poets, have thus far made names for themselves in French literature—Stuart Merrill and Francis Vielé-Griffin; but they are both, in spite of the recognized quality of their work, minor authors. As Julian Green is the first American novelist to choose French as his medium of expression, so he is the first American to be ranked by competent French critics as a great French writer.

It is easy for those who have seen the rise of certain contemporary French literary reputations, and know the slender, ephemeral bases upon which they rest, to feel that perhaps the present favor which Julian Green enjoys has been acquired in the same manner and that critics on neither side of the Atlantic would have noticed him so quickly, nor praised him quite so lavishly, if the unusual case of an American writing in French had not afforded news value to their criticisms of his work. A number of things,

however, militate against this conclusion: the fact that the Parisian critics, often, at the appearance of a new writer, divided into friendly and hostile camps according to his connections in the literary world, were practically unanimous in asserting that a highly gifted novelist had arisen; the fact that no blare of trumpets heralded his first book and no extensive advertising campaign prepared the public for the second; the fact that nine thousand copies of his first novel were sold in a year, over twenty thousand of his second in two months, and thirty thousand of his third in one week. Finally, a reading of his novels and of the stories included in this volume will dispel any doubts regarding the essential talents of the modest, unassuming author. Without preface or manifesto, with no new or highly original theories concerning the form and substance of the novel, Julian Green has been content to let his stories speak for him and his present reputation rests entirely upon them.

There was remarkably little difference of critical opinion in France with regard to his first two novels. Some questioned the accuracy of the French characters in *The Closed Garden*—it was as vigorously defended by others—and some deplored the extreme restraint and impersonality of his style, considering that an author should seek greater beauty of expression; nevertheless, all paid tribute to his great natural talents for narrative writing and his un-

usual technical skill. More than one have hailed him as the most highly gifted of his generation.

Astonishment has been expressed by certain patriotic writers in England and the United States that an American should choose to write in French. The reasons are so simple in Green's case that anyone not blinded by chauvinistic prejudice would have understood them without explanation.

Born and brought up in Paris, educated in French schools until his seventeenth year, with the friends of his childhood and adolescence all French, Julian Green's practice in writing English was almost entirely limited to letters to American relatives. When in school he studied grammar and composition, it was French; when he wrote themes, they were in French. English was merely the language of family conversation, as well as that of part of his reading. For these simple reasons, when now he conceives a novel and begins to write it, French appears to him his natural and normal medium of expression.

If a Frenchman born in the United States and educated in our schools should, at the age of twenty-four, begin a literary career with a novel written in French, we can well imagine that certain earnest critics would have much to say concerning the failure of our schools to Americanize the children of alien parents. To those who attempt to approach literary problems without the prejudices of national-

istic patriotism, it is less astonishing that Julian Green should, with his training, write in French than that his spoken English should be pure, idiomatic, and free from Gallic influence and vocabulary, as in fact it is.

The Pilgrim on the Earth is Julian Green's first successful story. Completed in December, 1924, it antedates by a year *Avarice House*, instead of being, as some critics have thought from the dates of publication, subsequent to the first novel.

When Julian Green returned to Paris in the summer of 1922, after three years spent at the University of Virginia, it was with the realization that the career of a college professor was not for him. It was not alone the various outside activities of the professorial life which persuaded him of this—the social exigencies of a college town and attendance at the various student events, which render the average instructor either a social butterfly or a hermit, according to his inclinations or his will power—he did not like teaching. Translation, that Rock of Gibraltar of American modern-language teaching, was a bugbear to the bilingual youth; and he never was able, as he humorously expresses it, to mark themes and examination papers with sufficient mathematical precision for the students not to be able quite rightly to question the accuracy and the justice of his grades. He looked back with pleasure at his years at the university, but it was because of the freedom ac-

corded him in the courses in which he studied to read omnivorously and as he wished, not because of his brief and not too agreeable career as a teacher.

Back in Paris, Green decided to become a painter and spent six months studying at the Academy of the Grande Chaumière. At the end of that time, however, he realized that, although he might learn to paint and really liked the work, he never would excel as an artist. Therefore he turned back to the ambition of his youth, to letters.

In the storeroom of his ample apartment in Paris—he uses for this purpose the servants' room, situated *à la française* on the top floor of the building—there are many manuscripts packed away: stories, full-length novels, even plays, written before he was seventeen. They are youthful works, crude and unpublishable, according to his own statements. However, they not only show the natural attraction which letters have always exerted upon him, but they also constitute his apprenticeship to his profession. They afforded him the necessary preliminary practice and acquainted him at first hand with the problems and the pitfalls of narrative writing. With them must be grouped a story in English, which he wishes forgotten, written while he was in Virginia.

In 1923, therefore, he began once more to write, as an experiment, to see if he could complete something which would satisfy him. The result was an article on William Blake. Encouraged, he returned to fiction and commenced *The Pilgrim on the Earth*.

But, after completing some twenty pages, he found it dull and, deciding that his method was at fault, he began it anew from a different angle. However, in the course of composition, the first version constantly forced itself in upon the second, and the completed story is thus a combination of the two.

It is a strange and haunting tale, this story of a breaking mind. Daniel O'Donovan is doomed by a heredity of which he knows nothing and, left without occupation or education by his uncle and aunt, he becomes more and more alive to the fact that he is different from other people. He senses the power of the mysterious forces against which he is blindly struggling without realizing either their true nature or their cause; and he comes to the conclusion that he is shackled and subjected by the uncle, who, in reality, leaves him quite free. He looks forward to the day when he will be his own master, when he will be able to do things, with only a vague idea of what those things will be and no sense of the necessary preparation for their doing. His mental condition is complicated by a deep interest in religion and, when his malady approaches the crisis, he passes through a spiritual crisis as well, arriving at the peace of passive resignation: "And suddenly it seemed to me that my despair was groundless because the very reason for it was illusory. . . . How had I been able to deceive myself so long and become so attached to books, my money, myself, and my peace of mind? Would not real despair rather come

from feeling oneself the victim of the material comforts which I had coveted? . . . Now the world could come to an end and life depart from me. All visible things existed only for my temptation and, by an impulse of the soul which broke my last resistance, I renounced in an instant the possession of all these things, all affection for the world, all hope of earthly happiness. . . ." In thus making the short and troubled life of his hero an epitome of the spiritual experiences of mankind, Julian Green raises his story from the realm of the particular to that of the universal and justifies the mystic title of the tale.

The Pilgrim on the Earth, *Avarice House*, and *The Closed Garden* might be called a Trilogy of Thwarted Youth. All three of the central characters—Daniel, Emily, and Adrienne—are cast in the an unhappy youth in a divided household where their elders take little interest in them, where they must live within themselves and with their dreams; and all three, either through heredity or by reason of their surroundings, are psychopathic characters. These solitary young people, growing up without social contacts, almost without contact with their family, have no realization of the truth that an individual's happiness lies in large part in himself. They belong to that section of humanity of whom Proust speaks in *le Côté de Guermantes*: those nervous people, hypersensitive to environment, who furnish artists to the world. All three feel that their lives are cramped

and narrow and look forward with more and more impatience to the day when they will be their own masters, independent of family intervention and repression. At the same time, they have neither social experience nor background; and when they make their first independent move they take their first step toward the final, tragic catastrophe. At the very moment when the future looks most bright, they find, as in the Greek tragedy, their Nemesis awaiting them. Both the novels and the story—the latter, shorter, shows it particularly well—are tragedies in the purest Greek sense, in that the young people, in spite of their determined struggles to forestall their destiny, find themselves inexorably doomed by powers stronger than they.

In an interview with Mr. Lefèvre, published in *les Nouvelles littéraires*, Julian Green spoke of himself as an objective novelist, one who was forced by temperament to write of things far removed from himself, whose imagination must remain free, untrammelled by real facts and real events. It is true that he has never been able to construct a story from an incident which he has witnessed, a story which he has read, or an event related to him; his plots have to come from his imagination and to work out in his own mind for him to be able to carry them to successful conclusion. Nevertheless, we may wonder. All three of his characters feel impotent before the force of circumstances, children when they should be becoming independent adults; and that, too, is what

he emphasizes with regard to Charlotte Brontë in his article upon her. Julian Green was twenty-five years of age when his first novel appeared. The war had interrupted his education, teaching had not appealed to him, and he had not been successful as a painter. At an age when most of his generation were already settled in their life work he was not too sure of what he was to do for a career. Anyone who has had a long professional training is familiar with the impatience, the desire to do instead of plan, the feeling of dependence which it generates. Does it not seem that these characters, beating their wings vainly against the walls that hem them in, longing for power, are a reflection, perhaps unconscious, of his own inward thoughts and feelings; and that the author's pessimism and discouragement in those first post-war years find their expression through these characters? Julian Green himself, while admitting the plausibility of the theory, does not think it true. He considers his personages to be the products of his imagination, entirely separate from himself. In any case, it will be interesting to watch the development of his talent and to see, as he matures and novel follows novel, whether thwarted youth will still attract him. His third novel, published in 1929, shows a broadening of his inspiration and a desire to depict—sometimes carefully and at length, sometimes briefly, with sharp, telling strokes—a much wider range of characters than has previously interested him.

Christine and *Leviathan* are the only short stories that Julian Green has published. *Leviathan*, which originally appeared in 1926 under the title of *la Traversée inutile*, was quite definitely inspired by his single trip to the United States. The monotony of life on shipboard and the necessity, even for a shy person, to make friends in order to pass the time endurably are what evidently most impressed the young man of studious interests whose roots had become so strongly fixed in Paris.

Only two characters appear in the story: the bluff, jocose Captain, whose limited intelligence makes him all the more sure of himself, and the Passenger. The latter is Green's typical hero. If he has not Daniel O'Donovan's mental handicap, he is at least as unsocial, reserved, and shy as Adrienne, Emily, and Daniel; and, in the Passenger's case there is a mysterious crime which foreshadows the motivation not only of *The Keys of Death* but also of his latest novel, likewise entitled *Leviathan* in the French original.

In *Christine*, for the first time, Green uses four characters to carry on his story and each one is set before us clearly, with a few deft strokes. He is gaining ability to characterize the eccentric personages which his imagination naturally conceives. All four of these characters are distinct, living individuals.

Both stories are short and very simple in plot and style; but they show, perhaps more clearly than the

longer ones, Julian Green's natural ability to arouse the reader's interest and maintain it by means of details which in themselves are most simple and ordinary, but which, juxtaposed, become immediately mysterious and dramatic. If the endings of the stories are somewhat disappointing, if we are inclined to desire more extended explanation, it is because Green is temperamentally more inclined to the mystery than the detective story. The latter, with every thread of its plot carefully worked out, is not for him. His imagination, like Hawthorne's in many of his short stories, seeks the mysterious, vague, and unexplored regions of the human soul, and, while concerning itself with living people, contrives to create about them an eery, inscrutable atmosphere. Like a painter, Green would leave much in shadow in order the better to set in relief the lighted portions of his picture.

The Keys of Death, the third story in this volume, was originally conceived as the first part of a very long novel, but, once it was completed, Green preferred to turn to a new idea for his third novel, which he completed in January, 1929. In *The Keys of Death* he returns to the manner of *The Pilgrim on the Earth*, and tells, by means of two "manuscripts," the strange tale of a boy's homicidal mania and of a girl possessed of occult powers.

As in *Christine*, Julian Green uses four characters throughout the story instead of the three

which were the rule in his earlier work. The mother will remind the reader of the aunt in *The Pilgrim on the Earth*, just as John has a certain superficial resemblance to Daniel O'Donovan, and Odile seems a development of the original idea for Christine. Jalon, however, is a new character, unlike any the author had heretofore created.

The young hero of *The Keys of Death*, who tells the story years after the occurrence of the events which he relates, is not unhappy, like Emily, Daniel, and Adrienne. He is quite content with life in the country manor-house with his mother and Odile, and disturbed only by the constant presence of the sinister Jalon. Although, like the previous characters, he lives much by himself with his thoughts and his dreams, he does not struggle against fate, but accepts all passively. Jalon is a powerful creation, his malevolent personality casting its shadow over the entire story, while in Odile Green mingles the realistic and the supernatural with ease and life-like probability.

It is in the style, however, that *The Keys of Death* distinguishes itself most sharply from the author's other stories. In his preceding work, Julian Green had been content to concentrate all his efforts upon the plot and its details. He had not sufficient faith in his narrative power to dare to add ornament. An American reading the first two novels finds himself absorbed by the action and is apt to welcome—something not too common in contempo-

rary letters—a style which is unobtrusive. The Frenchman misses certain stylistic finesses to which he is accustomed, and, more familiar with works which impose rather by their form than by their content, is surprised at the stark reticence of Julian Green. In *The Keys of Death*, however, there is a change in manner. For the first time the author has sought beauty of expression in descriptive passages of a certain length and, with the same skill which he has shown on the narrative side in his novels, he has attained it. Julian Green has too artistic and sensitive a mind, he is too thoroughly impregnated with French culture, to be able long not to write in the French manner. He has shown himself a novelist of genius in the first books. From now on we may expect him, while keeping the qualities which have given him his reputation, to develop further upon the purely compositional side, to improve and beautify his French style, and to become a perfectly rounded artist in his field. If he can do this—and his intellect and temperament will oppose no obstacles—he may well become what some French critics, in spite of their restrictions, expect—the greatest French novelist of his time and day.

C. B.

LEVIATHAN



❖❖❖

LEVIATHAN

HE HAD been waiting five minutes on the quay in front of the *Bonne Espérance*, whose huge prow hid from him the entire estuary. Gamins were playing about him in the piles of coal and the pyramids of barrels. He must have heard their cries and bursts of laughter, but, keeping his head bowed, he did not appear to see anything. He was tall, dressed in a worn coat with enormous pockets into which he had thrust his hands. The rim of his hat was pulled down over his eyes and hid his face. He stood there motionless, a large valise at his feet.

When, finally, one of the crew came to get him, he himself picked up the valise, the weight of which made his wrist tremble, and followed his guide over the narrow gangway to the deck of the vessel. The sailor showed him to his cabin. Once alone, he closed the porthole and screwed it tight, drew across it the little serge curtain, and took off his hat. He was a man of about forty, sad-faced, with regular features and no wrinkles, but his age could be guessed from the discouraged and mistrustful expression in his eyes and from that something in the color of the skin which shows that youth has passed.

Lifting his valise and setting it upon his berth, he opened it and unpacked his things with the air of a man who is resolved not to remain idle a second

and seeks to divert his thoughts by busying himself in a little physical labor.

Toward the end of the day a sailor came and asked him, on behalf of the captain, if he would have dinner in the dining-saloon. He did not answer at once. First he asked at what time the *Bonne Espérance* was weighing anchor. The sailor replied that it would be at eleven o'clock that very night.

"Very well," he said. "I shall not dine."

And he did not leave his cabin.

The next day Captain Suger sent word that he wanted to see him. The captain had all the manners of a perfectly frank person, even to the point of impoliteness. He addressed the man bluntly:

"Sir, you know that I almost never take passengers on this boat. Of course, regulations permit it, but my ship is first of all a freighter. I am making a sort of exception in your favor."

He stopped as if to give his single passenger time to say a word of thanks. But the man was silent. The captain put his hands in his pockets and raised himself on his toes with a somewhat quizzical expression.

"I shall be obliged to see your papers."

"I will show them to you if it is necessary," said the passenger, quietly.

"On board this ship what I want is always necessary," replied the captain, in the same tone.

There was a moment of silence while the man adjusted his eyeglasses, felt in the inside pocket of his

coat, and produced his passport, unfolding it. The captain took the document and examined it with the greatest care. He had a fat face in which curiosity put an infinite number of little folds, and eyes which looked at everything with a sort of greediness.

"Funny idea you had to travel on a freighter," he said at last, handing the passport back to the passenger. "We take twenty days, you know."

"I know," said the man.

And he folded up his passport again.

"Of course, it's a bit cheaper," resumed the captain, with a little grimace. "That's doubtless the reason why . . ."

He did not complete the sentence, but rose on his toes, appearing to wait, before letting himself drop back on his heels, for the passenger to give him an explanation. But the man remained silent.

"Besides," said the captain, "it's none of my business. . . ."

He gave a shrug of his shoulders and turned his back on the passenger. The man withdrew.

II

In spite of the roughness of the sea, a considerable cargo of raw materials assured the *Bonne Espérance* an almost perfect stability and, under threatening skies, she went her way heavily and slowly, but steadily.

The first days were rather painful for the pas-

senger. He was nothing of a sailor. One might even doubt, seeing his uncertain step and anxious air, whether he had ever before set foot on a ship's deck. The greater part of the day he remained in his cabin, where he seemed to enjoy himself. Certain men have the faculty of being able to settle down anywhere in such a way that they seem to be permanently located. How they manage it is a mystery; but all they have to do is to change the place of a few things and, in an inexplicable manner, the hotel room where they pass the night appears to have been theirs for a long time and to be a home which they will never leave. There must be something in them opposed to the idea of change which tends to give everything about them a certain aspect of permanence.

It was, perhaps, an instinctive impulse of this kind which made the passenger on the *Bonne Espérance* modify as much as possible the appearance of his cabin. He had thrown over his berth a beige blanket belonging to him, thus hiding the quilt that bore the monogram of the company. He had also removed from the back of the armchair the antimacassar which displayed the same monogram embroidered in bright colors. There were a few books on a little shelf originally intended for shoes. Finally, the table was now in a corner which was manifestly not designed to receive it, as was evident from the big bright spot its leg had left on the carpet where it had been before. Where the table was now, a single roll of the boat somewhat more severe than the others

would not fail to tip it over, but the traveler had only a limited knowledge of the sea.

Almost at the start of the voyage, torrential rains poured down upon the *Bonne Espérance* with such violence that one would have thought they were intent on making the boat return to port. But was there ever a case of a boat turning back because of rain? The captain laughed at the awful weather.

"You're the cause of this," he would say, insolently, to the traveler when they happened to meet in the passageway. Then the tall man would readjust his glasses and give a mirthless laugh resembling a cough. One day the captain remarked, brusquely, in a jocose manner:

"You're my guest, you know. You will have to take your meals at my table."

He put his little fat hands behind his back and resumed, in a tone which he intended to be humorous:

"That annoys you, eh?"

The man shook his head in protest.

"Say," said the captain, abruptly, "do you ever talk?"

Three days before he would not have risked so familiar and impertinent a question, but, as he gained the high seas, he felt more and more his importance. Such jokes were permissible four hundred miles from the French coast. The man made a sort of grimace in an attempt at a smile and retired with a bow.

From that day on they took their meals at the

same table, in a little saloon situated well forward on the boat. Through the large portholes could be seen the whole extent of the restless line of the horizon. A bright, hard light beat in upon the captain and the passenger seated opposite each other at the table.

"Here," said Suger, throwing himself back in his chair, "you really feel that you're at sea. We can't turn our heads without seeing it."

And he confided to his passenger that, of all the saloons and cabins on the boat, it was the one he liked the best. He was, as it were, born to the sea. He did not like dry land and cities. He enjoyed only the solitude of his ship.

"You think I'm gay, I suppose, because I joke," he said. "In reality, I have the gaiety of melancholy people." And, as if that confidence deserved another, he looked up abruptly and exclaimed: "But what about yourself? Tell me about yourself. You're not saying a word."

It was true. The man said nothing. He ate in silence, watching the captain through his glasses, nodded his head, but did not speak. Nevertheless, he did not appear to be timid; his eyes had that bold expression characteristic of near-sighted people who take for granted that everybody is acquainted with their infirmity and with their need of staring at people in order to see them clearly. Occasionally, however, something went over his face, but it was too rapid for the captain to think of noticing it. Was it

the effect of a sudden indisposition? Suddenly his pupils would grow misty, seem to become larger, and his head would drop. A horrible despair spread over his features, remained a moment, and then disappeared immediately in a contraction of his whole face. It was like a nervous twitch. Whenever this happened, the passenger always took off his eye-glasses and bowed his head a little.

They had reached the dessert and the captain was playing with his knife, balancing it on his fore-finger.

"Yes," he repeated, "you never say anything. However, I don't give up. A few days more at sea and you'll be more loquacious."

The passenger shrugged his shoulders, removed his glasses, and began to wipe them.

"We shall see," he seemed to say.

Certainly the captain was right. A week on board a freighter, meaning almost complete solitude for a passenger, transforms a man. Even the melancholy cannot resist it. One must speak, become acquainted with some one, make friends, even if it is only to abandon them on arriving at port. But is it not curious that after five or six days at sea a person begins to think less of his destination and tends to forget it entirely in proportion as he approaches it? The monotony of the voyage pervades one and with it the singular idea that what has lasted for so many days can never come to an end. If only there were a moment's diversion, if only one were to pass

an island, or to perceive in the distance the last cape of a continent! But nothing comes to interrupt the infinite line of the sea, which is there when one awakes, during meals, and all day long. For a person of nervous temperament, the monotony of the scene is a trial, almost a torture. And so it is that people on board a boat turn, as if toward their salvation, to the company of their fellows, even if they have contempt for them, even if they hate them. For they have to live, they have to escape from the consuming boredom of the days, from the sea, and from that leviathan, ever lying in wait, which silently accompanies them.

III

Have I said that the *Bonne Espérance* was going from France to America? It was taking the longest route and shaping its course straight for Savannah. The captain was perfectly contented. For a long time he had been resigned to the sea, availing himself, to break his solitude, of conversations with the sailors or, when there were any, with the passengers. A passenger was a windfall. Like many people of mediocre intelligence who have read a few novels, the captain prided himself on knowing a great deal about what he called psychology, and he amused himself by watching the people about him. He believed he possessed considerable insight into charac-

ter, and he had no doubt of his ability to find, after a few hours' conversation, the *formula*, to use an expression of which he was fond, of the people he was studying. I will not go so far as to say that he set down his observations in writing, but it would have been in character. When he had given orders to everybody and supervised the working of the ship, a long day remained ahead of him which it was necessary to fill. So the passenger furnished him with a precious diversion. He considered himself fortunate in having him on board, exactly as a geometrician rubs his hands in anticipation before a difficult problem. When he came to think of it, he liked those cold ways, that silence which had irritated him at first, and that reserve which, taking it all in all, prolonged the game and rendered it more interesting.

Meanwhile, the traveler seemed resolved to remain silent. It was evident that the inquisitive looks of the captain displeased him and that he considered the meal hours excessively disagreeable; but he tried to conceal his feelings, and what he revealed was only in spite of himself. If the captain had been as observing as he considered himself, he would surely have guessed that the traveler was afraid of him; but he was following another line of thought and he believed that he was dealing merely with a misanthropic and proud man. Pleased with his discovery, he was at present taxing his ingenuity to ask adroit questions which would flatter the traveler in his vanity

and at the same time lead him to confidences concerning himself. These tactics failed, however, just as the captain's brusque manner and precise questions had failed in the first place. The traveler said nothing; the only result was that, when the captain became too insistent, he lowered his head, as one lowers one's head before a squall.

Now the sky was clear and the *Bonne Espérance* seemed to be making better time. The air was mild. Silence reigned, scarcely interrupted by the murmur of the waves as they spread out on either side of the boat's prow. But the traveler did not leave his cabin. There only he seemed at ease. One would have said that he had everything to fear outside that little room, and that, once across the threshold, his life was in danger. Occasionally sailors passing on the deck saw at one of the portholes a white face with a hesitant expression. Suddenly frightened, it disappeared immediately.

Faced with the passenger's silence, the captain remained at first taken aback; then he became angry. He had invited this man to his table, he had talked frankly to him as to a friend, an old friend, he had even confided to him several facts concerning his private life; and he had obtained nothing at all in return. Of course, it is interesting to fathom the secrets of a taciturn person by resorting to nothing more than observation and intelligence, but after almost three weeks the captain had had enough. There

was something repelling in the passenger's morose face, and his silence was no longer interesting.

IV

The voyage was drawing to its close. Already a sea gull, harbinger of approaching land, had alighted on the deck of the boat, only to set off again with the heavy flight of his long curved wings. One day, when the captain rose from the table, he planted himself before his guest, who had said nothing since the beginning of the meal. He raised himself on his toes and fell back again on his heels.

"You know, we arrive the day after tomorrow," he said.

The man raised his head. The captain's severe expression doubtless frightened him. He made a sort of grimace, took off his glasses, and answered in a voice which was scarcely audible:

"I know."

He seemed so dejected that the captain's irritation gave way before an impulse of compassion.

"Are you all right?" asked Suger, after a moment. "You're not ill?"

The man shook his head.

As the passenger was returning to his cabin, a sudden roll of the boat threw him from the wall which he was using as a support, against one of the ship's boats, suspended in its davits. He threw his arms out convulsively and, clutching the davit ropes,

gazed down at the sea with the horrified expression of a man brought suddenly face to face with death.

"Don't be afraid," cried the captain, who was following him at a distance.

And he went and helped him back to his cabin.

That day passed like the others, except for the fact that the captain asked fewer questions than usual. He had evidently become resigned to a silence which no effort of his could break and he even seemed, by an impulse of good nature which did him honor, to be trying to be more agreeable to the passenger than he had been up to that time. Was it because the really dejected expression of the traveler aroused his pity? At times the captain looked at him out of the corner of his eye and shook his head sadly. The traveler ate very little and spent most of his time bent over his plate, rubbing his knees unceasingly with the palms of his hands. From his high-buttoned frock coat and his poor but neat appearance, one might have taken him for a teacher.

The last day broke on a hazy but calm sea and, when the two men sat down at the table together for the last time, the sky was radiant; the gusts of cool air had a perfume in which one might imagine one already distinguished the delicious odor of earth and trees.

"Well," said the captain, pouring out wine for his guest, "let's part good friends. Let's drink to each other's health."

The man seemed dazed and in anguish. He raised

his glass and held it in the air for a moment. Then he suddenly let it fall to the tablecloth and to the floor.

"I have something to tell you," he murmured.

He grew pale and repeated what he had said in a louder tone, as if he were afraid that the captain had not heard him. The latter seemed overcome with surprise and joy.

"Well," said he, laughing, "didn't I tell you? I knew that you would end by talking. I know the sea!" And he gave a sonorous laugh in which a certain embarrassment was noticeable. "Compose yourself," he continued, seeing that the traveler was trembling. "You can tell me anything, you know. I'm a perfect father confessor."

Then the traveler put both hands on the table and bowed his head in the attitude of a person collecting his thoughts. And he told his story.

When he had finished, the captain said:

"Well?"

"Well, that's all," answered the passenger.

"What!" exclaimed Suger. "That's why you left the country? You're crazy. You were unmolested in France. . . ."

"I was not easy in my mind."

"You might as well have been. No one suspected you."

The traveler shook his head.

"Come," resumed the captain, "there must be something else. That just barely constitutes a crime!"

At these words the traveler raised his eyes quickly and looked at the captain. Beads of perspiration stood out on his temples. Abruptly he struck the table with his clenched fist and exclaimed:

"Everything I have just told you is false! I have deceived you. I am not a criminal!"

"Then why the devil did you tell me all that?" asked the captain.

"Because you forced me to. You look at me continually, you ask me all sorts of questions, you are like a detective on the track of a murderer. I said the first thing that came into my mind." He struck the table once more with his fist and cried out, in a choking voice: "I was afraid. You frightened me. I am going to America on business. I am not a murderer at all."

The captain shrugged his shoulders tranquilly and smiled.

"Yes, you are," said he. "But you have nothing to fear from me. I shall not talk."

The traveler bowed his head and his glasses dropped upon the table. At the same moment the call of a siren rent the air and some one up forward cried:

"Land, ho!"

The captain rose from his chair with a bound and took a rapid glance through a porthole.

"Land, ho!" he cried in his turn. Then he added, "Many thanks. I saw it ten minutes ago."

And he left the saloon with an important air.

He went down the little companionway leading to the deck and called out orders to sailors who were passing. Birds were circling about the smokestack, uttering wild cries. On the horizon a line darker than the water indicated America.

Then the captain turned toward the dining-saloon, the six portholes of which could be seen above him, and, putting his hands up to his mouth, he shouted, joyfully:

“Ho, there! Passenger! We are arriving!”

But already for some minutes the traveler had been dead.

CHRISTINE



CHRISTINE

*"She was a phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight;
A lovely apparition sent
To be a moment's ornament."*

—WORDSWORTH.

THE Fort Hope road runs almost exactly parallel to the black lines of the reefs from which it is separated by bands of bare, flat ground. A dull sky hangs heavy over the cheerless landscape, which is unrelieved by the bright colors of any vegetation except, in places, the faint greenness of a languishing grass. In the distance can be seen a long, glittering, gray line. It is the sea.

We were in the habit of passing the summer there in a house built on an eminence at some distance back from the road. In America, where antiquity is of recent date, the house was considered very ancient and, as a matter of fact, there was an inscription in the center of the façade certifying that it was built in 1640, at the time when the Pilgrims, at the points of their muskets, were establishing the Kingdom of God in these barbarous regions. Firmly set in the natural rock, it opposed to the frenzy of the winds which blew from the sea solid walls of smooth stone and a rudimental gable which made one think of the prow of a boat. Below the little round window in the gable, these words could be read, carved in Rhode

Island flint, the hardest material in the world: *In God We Trust*.

There is not an aspect of the old Puritan house of which my mind has not kept a distinct image, not a piece of furniture the secrets and defects of which my hand could not find without hesitation; and I should experience, I think, the same joys as those of former days, as well as the same terrors, in following the long corridors with their arched ceilings, and in reading again above those doors which a child could move only with difficulty, the mottoes, in Old English lettering, taken from the Psalms.

I remember that all the rooms were so spacious that they seemed empty and that in them the human voice had a sound which it did not have in the city, in the apartment where we lived in Boston. Was it an echo? The voice seemed to strike against the walls and you had the impression that some one beside you was repeating the last part of your sentence. It amused me at first. When I mentioned it to mother, she advised me to pay no attention to it; but I had occasion to observe that in this house she herself spoke less than was usual with her, and more quietly.

II

The summer of my thirteenth year was marked by a rather peculiar incident, so distressing that I have never been able to decide to clear up the whole mystery, for it seems to me that it must have been still

more pathetic than I thought at the time. Is it not better sometimes not to attempt to seek out the truth? And if such prudence is not always commendable, it is certainly wiser in cases such as the one I am about to relate than an audacious spirit of investigation.

I was nearly thirteen years old when mother announced to me, one August morning, the arrival of Aunt Judith. She was a more or less enigmatic person whom we almost never saw because she lived at a great distance from us, in Washington. I knew that she had had a very unhappy life and that, for some unexplained reason, she had not been able to marry. I was not fond of her. Her fixed stare made me lower my eyes and she had a gloomy manner which I did not like. Her features were as regular as my mother's, but more severe, and a singular expression of displeasure kept the corners of her mouth continually raised in a bitter half-smile.

Going down to the parlor a few days later, I found my aunt in conversation with mother. She had not come alone: a little girl of about my own age was at her side, but back to the light, so that at first I could not distinguish her features. My aunt seemed vexed to see me and, turning brusquely to my mother, she said a few rapid words which I did not catch. Then she touched the shoulder of the little girl, who took a step forward and dropped me a curtsy.

"Christine," said mother, "this is my little boy. His name is John. John, shake hands with Christine and kiss your aunt."

As I approached the little girl, I had to restrain myself in order not to utter a cry of admiration. Beauty—and even at the age I was then—has always moved me to the strongest and the most diverse feelings. The result is a sort of internal struggle which makes me pass in the space of a single moment from joy to desire and from desire to despair. For that reason I hope, and at the same time fear, to discover that beauty which will torment and delight me; and I seek it out, but with a painful anxiety and the secret hope that I shall not find it. Christine's beauty transported me. With the light behind her, her eyes seemed black, made larger by the shadows about them. The forceful lines of her mouth stood out strongly in the smoothness and the spotless perfection of her skin. An immense aureole of blond hair seemed to gather into its depths all the light which came from the window and gave an almost supernatural color to her cheeks and forehead. I gazed in silence at that little girl whom I should have been ready to believe an apparition if I had not already grasped in mine the hand which she extended to me. My stare did not cause her to lower her eyes; she seemed, in fact, not to see me, but to be fixing her gaze obstinately upon some one or something behind me. That impression was borne in upon me so strongly that I turned around. Mother's voice brought me back to myself and I kissed my aunt, who then withdrew with Christine.

Even today it is difficult for me to believe that

the events which I am about to relate actually happened; and, nevertheless, my memory is trustworthy and I am inventing nothing. I never saw Christine again or, in any case, I saw her only once or twice more and in the most imperfect manner. My aunt came downstairs alone. We took our meal without Christine and the afternoon passed without her returning to the parlor.

Toward evening mother sent for me and told me that I was to sleep not on the second floor as I had up to that time, but on the third and far, consequently, from the guest-chambers where Christine and my aunt were. I cannot tell what took place within me. I should have been willing to believe that I had had a dream. With what joy I should have learned that it was all only an illusion and the little girl I thought I had seen did not exist! For it was cruel in a very different way to think that she was living in the same house with me and that I was deprived of the opportunity of seeing her.

I begged mother to tell me why Christine had not come down to lunch, but she immediately assumed a serious manner and replied that I had no need to know and that I was never to mention Christine again to anyone. Those strange instructions amazed me, and I wondered for a moment whether mother had lost her senses or I mine. I turned what she had said over in my mind, but without being able to arrive at any other explanation for it than a malicious desire on her part to torment me.

At dinner my mother and aunt, so that I would not understand, began to speak in French, a language they knew well but of which I did not understand a word. I realized, however, that they were talking about Christine, for her name occurred rather often in the course of their conversation. Finally, yielding to my impatience, I bluntly asked what had become of the little girl and why she did not appear at either lunch or dinner. The answer came in the form of a box on the ear from my mother, who took that way of recalling to my mind the instructions she had given me. As for my aunt, she frowned in a way which rendered her in my eyes very awful to look upon. I said no more.

Who, then, was the little girl? If I had been more observing and not quite so young, I should certainly have noticed the peculiarity of her expression. Was I not already familiar with that fixed stare? Had I seen no one with that indefinable little grimace which resembled a smile and yet was not? But I was very far from thinking of studying my aunt's face, and I was too innocent to discover a relationship between Christine and that woman who at the time seemed monstrous to me.

III

I shall pass rapidly over the two weeks which followed in order to come at once to the most curious part of the story. The reader will imagine without

difficulty all the tediousness of my solitude, which, formerly so tranquil, was now unendurable, and my sorrow at feeling myself separated from one for whom I felt I should have willingly sacrificed my life. Several times while I was wandering about the house, the idea came to me to attract Christine's attention and make her come to the window, but I had no sooner thrown some pebbles up against her windows than a severe voice called me back into the parlor. A strict watch was kept over me and my plan always failed.

I changed. I became somber and no longer took any pleasure in anything. I could not even read or undertake anything which required concentration. I was obsessed by a single idea—to see Christine again. I arranged things so as to be on the stairs when mother, my aunt, or Dinah, the maid, passed carrying Christine her luncheon or her dinner. Of course I was not allowed to follow them, but I experienced a melancholy pleasure in listening to the sound of those steps which went to her.

My aunt was displeased at this innocent maneuver and she suspected in me, I think, more intentions than I was conscious of myself. One evening she told me an awful story concerning the part of the house which she occupied with Christine. She confided to me that she had seen some one pass by close to her in the hall which led to their room. Was it a man or a woman? She could not say, but she was sure of one thing: she had felt a warm breath against her face.

And then for some moments she watched my expression attentively as if to measure the effect of her words upon me. I must have grown pale under her gaze. It was easy to terrify me with such tales, and this one seemed horrible to me, for my aunt had planned it well and she told me neither too much nor too little. So, far from thinking of going as far as Christine's room, I hesitated from that time on even to venture upon the stairs after nightfall.

From the time of my aunt's arrival, mother had taken the habit of sending me to Fort Hope every afternoon, on the pretext that she wanted me to buy a newspaper there; but, in reality, I am sure it was to get me away from the house at an hour when Christine was to go out for a walk.

Things remained thus for two long weeks. I lost my color and purple shadows began to appear around my eyes. Mother looked at me closely when I went to see her in the morning, and occasionally, seizing me abruptly by the wrist, she would say to me in a voice which trembled a little:

"Wretched child!"

But her anger and her sadness did not move me. All I cared about was Christine.

The vacation was drawing to a close and I had lost all hope of ever seeing her again, when an event which I did not expect gave an unforeseen turn to the adventure and, at the same time, brought it to a sudden end.

One evening at the beginning of September we had

a thunderstorm after a day of overwhelming heat. The first drops of rain were splashing against the windows as I went upstairs to my room, and it was then, while on my way from the second to the third floor, that I heard a peculiar noise I can compare to nothing except the rolling of a drum. My aunt's story came back to my mind and I began to dash rapidly up the stairs, when all at once I was stopped by a loud cry. It was neither mother's voice nor my aunt's, but a voice so piercing, so high, and of so strange a tone that it made me think of the call of an animal. A sort of vertigo seized me. I leaned against the wall. For nothing in the world would I have taken a step back, but it was equally impossible for me to go on, and I remained where I was, senseless from terror. A moment later the noise redoubled in violence and then I understood that it was some one, Christine beyond a doubt, who, for reasons I did not understand, was pounding on a door with her fists. Finally I mustered sufficient courage, not to find out what it was and go to Christine's aid, but rather to dash upstairs as fast as I could. Once in my room, imagining that I still heard the rolling of a drum and the same cry of a moment before, I fell on my knees and, putting my fingers in my ears, began to pray aloud.

IV

The next morning, in the parlor, I found my aunt in tears and mother beside her, talking to her and

holding her hands in hers. They both seemed greatly excited and did not notice me. I did not fail to take advantage of circumstances which seemed so promising for finally learning something about what had happened to Christine, for they must be talking about her; and I stealthily took a seat just behind them. In that way I found out in a few moments that the storm of the night before had had a very serious effect upon the little girl. Seized with terror at the first rumblings of thunder, she had called, tried to get out of her room, and finally had fainted away.

"I ought never to have brought her here," exclaimed my aunt. And she added without a transition, but with an accent which I cannot describe and as if the words were killing her, "She tried to *say* something to me!"

I was in my room two hours later when mother entered with a long Paisley shawl and the hood she wore when she was going out. I had never seen her look so serious.

"John," she said, "Christine, the little girl you saw the day your aunt arrived, is not well and we are anxious. Listen. We are both going to Providence this afternoon to consult a doctor and we are going to bring him back here with us. Christine is to remain here and Dinah will look after her. Will you promise me that you will not go near Christine's room while we are away?"

I promised.

"It is a very serious matter, but I have confidence

in you," she continued, looking at me suspiciously. "Could you swear to me on the Bible that you will not go upstairs while we are gone?"

I nodded. Shortly after lunch, mother and my aunt departed.

My first impulse was to go up to Christine's room immediately, but after a moment's reflection I hesitated, for I was by nature faithful to my word. Finally, the temptation was too strong and, after making sure that Dinah, who had carried Christine her lunch an hour before, had really returned to the kitchen, I went up to the second floor.

When I reached the haunted hall, or, rather, the hall Aunt Judith claimed was haunted, my heart began to beat violently. It was long, with several turns, and very dark. Over the entrance there was a Biblical inscription which at that moment assumed a special meaning in my mind: *Yea, though I walk in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil.* That verse which I read mechanically made me remember that I had given my word of honor not to do what I was doing at that very moment. I had not, however, actually sworn upon the Bible and my conscience was for that reason a bit pacified.

I had gone scarcely three or four feet before I had to do my utmost to control my imagination in order not to retrace my steps, overcome with fear. The thought that perhaps I would see the little girl again and touch her hand once more kept up my courage. I began to run on my toes, holding my

breath, frightened by the length of that interminable corridor; and, as I could no longer see my way before me, in a moment I ran headlong into Christine's door. In my excitement I did not think of knocking and I tried to open the door. But it was locked. I could hear Christine walking about in the room. At the noise I made she had moved toward the door. I waited, hoping that she would open, but she stopped and remained still.

In vain I knocked, gently at first, then more and more loudly. I called Christine, I spoke to her, I told her that I was Aunt Judith's nephew, that I was charged with a message for her and that she must open. Finally, giving up hope of getting any reply, I knelt down before the door and looked through the keyhole. Christine was standing some distance away, watching the door attentively. A long night-dress covered her, falling to her feet. I could see her bare toes beneath it. Her hair, no longer held in place by any comb, spread about her head like a mane. I noticed that her cheeks were flushed. Her eyes, of a brilliant blue in the light that struck her face, had that motionless stare which I had not forgotten, and the singular feeling came over me that she could see me through the wood of the door and that she was watching me. She looked even more beautiful than I had believed and I was beside myself at seeing her so near and not being able to throw myself at her feet. Finally, overcome by an emotion so long contained, I suddenly burst into tears and, strik-

ing my head against the door, gave myself up to despair.

After a certain length of time an idea came to my mind which brought back my courage, an idea which I considered ingenious, because its imprudence did not then occur to me. I scrawled in big letters on a piece of paper:

“Christine, open the door for me. I love you.”

And I slipped it under the door.

Looking through the keyhole, I saw her fall upon the paper and turn it over and over in every direction with an air of great curiosity, but without appearing to understand what I had written on it. All at once she dropped it and went into a part of the room where my glance could not follow her. In my distraction I called to her as loudly as I could and, without realizing any longer what I was saying, I promised to give her a present if she would consent to open the door. Those words, which came to me on the spur of the moment, gave me the idea of a new scheme.

In all haste I went upstairs to my room and hunted about in the drawers of my bureau to find something which I could use as a present; but I had nothing. I then dashed into mother's room and went carefully through the contents of all her chests of drawers, but I saw nothing there, either, which seemed to me worthy of Christine. Finally I perceived, pushed up against the wall and behind a piece of furniture, the trunk that my aunt had brought with her. Doubtless

they had thought that it would not be safe in the same room with a curious little girl. In any case, the trunk happened to be unlocked and I had only to raise the lid to plunge into it my feverish hands. After searching for some time, I discovered a little shark-skin case carefully hidden under some linen. How well I remember it! Lined with watered silk, it contained some colored ribbons and a few rings, to one of which I took a liking at once. It was a very slender gold ring with a small sapphire. A roll of letters had been passed through it like a paper finger and I pulled them out, tearing them in the process.

I went back immediately to Christine's chamber and called to her again, but with no other result than to make her come close to the door as she had done the first time. Then I slipped the ring under the door, saying:

"Christine, here is your present. Open the door for me."

And I knocked with the flat of my hand on the bottom of the door to attract her attention. She had, however, already seen the ring and seized it. For a moment she held it in the hollow of her hand, examining it. Then she tried to put it on her thumb, but the ring was too small and stopped a little below the nail. She stamped her foot and tried to push it on by force. I cried to her:

"No! Not on that finger!"

But either she did not hear me or she did not

understand. She suddenly waved her hand; the ring had gone on. She gazed at it in admiration for a few minutes and then tried to take it off. She pulled with all her might, but in vain; the ring resisted. Then she bit it with rage. Finally, after a series of desperate efforts to dislodge it, she threw herself on the bed with loud and angry cries. I fled.

When, three hours later, mother and my aunt returned, accompanied by a doctor from Providence, I was in my room, a prey to a nameless fear. I did not dare to go downstairs at dinner-time, and when darkness came I went to sleep.

V

Toward five o'clock the next morning a noise of wheels drew me to the window, and I saw a two-horse carriage drawing up before our door. Everything that happened after that gave me the impression of being a bad dream. I saw the maid help the coachman to load my aunt's trunk on top of the carriage; then my aunt appeared, supported by mother. They kissed several times. A man followed them—I suppose it was the doctor from Providence who had spent the night at our house—holding Christine by the hand. She wore a great hood which concealed her face and on the thumb of her right hand glittered the ring she had been unable to remove.

Neither mother nor my aunt, whom I saw again

alone some months later, told me a word about the whole affair, and I really thought that I had dreamed it. Is it credible? I actually forgot it. The human heart is indeed strange.

The following summer, my aunt did not come on; but a few days before Christmas, as she was passing through Boston, she made us an hour's visit. Mother and I were in the parlor and I was looking out the window, watching the city men throwing shovelfuls of sand upon the icy sidewalks, when my aunt suddenly made her appearance. She stopped a moment on the parlor threshold, mechanically removing her gloves. Then, without a word, she threw herself, sobbing, into mother's arms. On her ungloved hand shone the little sapphire.

Outside, the sand fell with mournful thuds upon the pavement.

THE KEYS OF DEATH



16

THE KEYS OF DEATH

I hold the Keys of Death...

—REVELATION, I, 18.

EVERY year I go and pass a few hours at Ferrière. It is quite a large estate which I inherited from my mother, but a place where I am not happy. For that reason Ferrière is for sale, and during the last two years photographs of the old house have been growing yellow in the real-estate agencies of all the neighboring towns.

Occasionally I hear that some one intends to look at it. Then I write to the caretakers, I write to the agency; but the only one who ever takes the trouble to visit Ferrière is myself, for I must make sure that the house is not in need of repairs.

During one of these visits I found in a secretary the first of the following manuscripts. I do not need to explain here the feeling which it aroused in me; it is sufficient to say that I immediately felt the desire to complete it, just as if it were, one day, to have a reader.

That is the origin of the second manuscript.

R. N.

1910.

THE other day I was stretched out in the grass before the house, listening to the song of the reaper

as he went from one end of the meadow to the other, seated on top of his machine with its squeaking wheels and driving our old mare. But I did not see him. Where I was the grass was still thick and still full of those fragile flowers without perfume which live but a few days in the wind and sun. They bent over my face as if they were trying to hide me from the reaper, but at the slightest breath of air they swayed and waved about in all directions. Through the confused mass of their stems and stalks the sky was so clear and cloudless that looking at it tired my eyes, and, from lassitude, I closed them.

Then the reaper's song, carried by the wind along the surface of the grass, came most distinctly to my ears. I do not know what he was singing. He was far away, close to the birch trees which mark the limit of our meadow, and at times I could scarcely hear him, for he had to keep going down into the great hollow near the well, and that was where his machine was turning, in front of the stone trough.

For a few seconds I would hear nothing but the murmur of the wind. Then the voice of the reaper and the somewhat sad refrain of his rustic song would once more come back to me across the vast meadow which extends as far as the birches, and thus I could follow his progress and tell at any moment where he was.

I said to myself: "I will wait until he has gone once more from the watering-trough to the birch trees. Then I'll get up and go back to the house."

But I really had no desire to leave, since I remained there as I was, lying on my back, my hands clasped under my head. Besides, what should I do in the house? Nothing, certainly. I have no work which compels my presence in any special place; I do what I wish, subjected to no discipline whatever, and, if I want to lie on my back in the grass the whole day long, who, then, will reprove me? Surely not my mother, whose trembling step never ventures beyond the first trees of the avenue, nor my uncle, who thinks only of his trips to neighboring towns. But there is something which prevents me from enjoying to the full my restful inaction beneath the heavens, a strange sort of anxiety which I cannot describe but which poisons my joy.

When the reaper descended to the trough and when his voice no longer carried as far as the spot where I was lying, it seemed to me that another voice arose, although I know that there was no one else in that meadow but the reaper and myself. I am not a dreamer, an imbecile; for me, at least, the earth does not sing or speak. However, each time that the reaper disappeared in the hollow and I no longer heard his song, I am certain that another voice took the place of his. One would have said that it continued the interrupted song, but on a higher, more even tone. It was not the wind. On the contrary, if the wind began to blow, the mysterious voice ceased instantly and I heard nothing but the vague murmur of the air moving past me toward its unknown goal.

But when all was silence the voice returned. It seemed to come from everywhere, from both far and near, and I could not have said whether it originated in the grass about me or at the limits of the great plain which stretches out beyond our meadow as far as the foot of the hills. It resembled no human voice nor any other sound which I have ever heard.

The most curious thing about it, however, a thing which I should not dare to confide to anyone—for who would believe me?—was that this voice, extraordinary enough in itself, ceased to be audible as soon as I listened intently for it. In fact, in order to hear it I had to close my eyes, make an effort to think of nothing, and let myself go into a sort of torpor. Then this strange sound came immediately from everywhere and sang in my ears. It was as if thousands of words, fraught with meaning, were being spoken in a language which I could not understand. I remained motionless and held my breath, for fear that the miracle would of a sudden cease.

Then there would come a moment when the voice grew sharper, with a certain vibration which I knew well; and it rose, rose with a terrible rapidity, to finish in a strident cry which reëchoed painfully within me. I say a cry. How can I describe it otherwise? It was not a cry such as leaves our breasts and it did not express anything of a human emotion, but it came every time that the voice of the reaper commenced to rise toward the sky, and I could not help thinking to myself that, if the mysterious voice

began thus to vibrate and mount so quickly, it was to escape that human voice whose coming it anticipated and against which, as it were, it broke as against a wall.

That is what I heard the other day in the meadow; and I remained there a good hour, perhaps longer, until the moment when the reaper came so near to me that the sound of the hoofs of his horse resounded dully on the ground beneath me. Then I raised myself a little and called out to him.

He gave a cry and pulled up. Scarcely ten feet separated us.

"Are you there, Mr. John? If you had been asleep I might have hit you with my machine."

He is gazing at me. The air and the wind have tanned his skin and the pale gray eyes in his oak-brown countenance look like two holes through which I can see the light. I have to throw back my head in order to look him in the face, for he is almost above me and his shoulders hide from me a whole section of the sky. In relief against the sunlight the man looks black and gigantically tall.

"I should have gone by you twice more," he continues, "and then . . ."

He laughs and shakes his head. I laugh too.

"Don't you believe it!" I say to him. "In the first place, I shouldn't go to sleep here."

I take pleasure in watching him thus motionless before me, waiting for me to tell him to start up again. All I had to do was to call him and he im-

mediately pulled up. He has stopped his busy, noisy machine, and the panting horse, nostrils lowered, is standing idle. A few seconds pass in silence, but I am sure that the voice will not return now; it is too afraid of this fellow before me, wiping his forehead with the back of his sleeve, and this horse which raises a hoof from time to time and plunges it dreamily into the deep grass. I love to talk to the reaper.

"Marcolet, do you think the weather will be good this week?"

Before he says a word, I know what his answer will be, for he is looking at the clouds flying on toward the hills and I observed long ago the color which the sky is taking on above the birch trees and I have guessed its meaning.

"No," he says at last.

"So you think it will rain for my birthday?"

Marcolet shakes his head.

"It will not rain this week," he answers.

Of course it will not rain. It will be warmer for a few days and then that dull color which I see between the trees will gradually spread further and grow darker until it becomes black, even, perhaps in the middle of the day. Already the clouds are fleeing, as from a place of ill omen, from this sky so pure and bright that the eyes tire from looking at it; and they are going to carry elsewhere the blessing of rain. The trees now moving in the breeze will soon be motionless, as if struck with fear, a fear which rises from the ground, which comes from every-

where, from far and near, like that voice which I have heard.

“What are you thinking about, John?”

It is not that she really expects an answer; it is merely that she sees that I am uneasy and silent and she asks me that question only because her conscience would trouble her if she did not. In that way she gives me the opportunity of confiding in her if I feel the need to do so and she will have done her duty. I answer:

“Nothing. Of the weather.”

How placid she is now! One arm on the back of my chair, she leans over me. I feel her lips on my forehead and upon my hair which the wind has tangled; and already she straightens up and disappears into the next room, where many little things are awaiting her: the clean linen which she and the maid must examine, in addition to something of which she has made a mental note and something else which she will presently recall. She has left the doors open, in order that the air may circulate a little in the house, for the day is hot; and I see her going back and forth with her little meticulous and trembling step.

Two or three hours ago she was worrying about Odile, who is ill, and whom my uncle has gone to Soissons to bring home; but now she is not even thinking about her. The first emotion past, the housework has again engaged her whole attention and she

is thinking only of her sheets, her handkerchiefs, and her shirts, with a trembling fear that she may discover a hole or a tear in them. She is so small in her white corsage and linen skirt, and so old! She has been as old as that for years. I think that her hair turned white all at once; and her face must have grown wrinkled, her shoulders bent, in a day, in an hour, at the time my father died. But one would say that, after thus striking and breaking her, life had resolved to leave her in peace because for the last fifteen years the days have passed almost alike for my mother, none more noteworthy than the rest, but all of them full of the little occupations which keep her interested from one season to another.

In that room with the half-closed shutters, where the linen is piled high upon the yellow chest, I can see her leaning over the shirts and the napkins, unfolding them, examining them, murmuring something, and then handing them to the maid beside her, who, as fast as she receives them, goes and puts them away in the clothespress. Then they both pick up a sheet by the corners, open their arms wide and take a few steps backward. Silence. They are close by the window and they are examining the sheet carefully from one edge to the other, for fear of discovering a hole or tear. But there is not one. Mother has said, "Good," and they come toward each other again, folding up the sheet.

I see all that from the place where I am, as I have seen it every Thursday since my childhood,

and the scene is so familiar that I cannot describe the effect which it produces upon me today. That is the way with certain things which one has watched attentively many times. After seeming for years simple and natural, one day, one moment among all, the same things suddenly take on an extraordinary aspect, doubtless because they have occurred so often. They no longer seem natural; they have become strange and almost fantastic. In the same way, in the midst of a dream that one has had hundreds of times, one regains consciousness little by little and awakes in the night, one's whole body wet with the perspiration which fear has brought out upon the skin.

I experience that today. Those two women, approaching each other before the window with that great white sheet held in their outstretched hands, give me the impression of being nothing more than ghosts or phantoms and it seems to me that, in reality, there is no one in that room with the half-closed shutters, but that what I see is merely a vision mocking me. Both dressed in white, they are now motionless in the semi-darkness, both alert, their eyes intent upon that sheet as upon a great mysterious page upon which they might read destinies. And the words they exchange in the meantime do not break the charm, for they are spoken very low, nor their steps beneath which the floor hardly gives; but, between those whispering voices and that slight creaking of the floor, I feel as if some sort of an

obscure and familiar enchantment suddenly held me in its power.

I rise and leave the room, and the sound of my steps comforts me once more, for they are alive. Rather than remain in that house where darkness is shut up as if it were a treasure, I prefer to walk outside in the burning air which dries the grass and stifles the flowers, under that copper sky which receives its light from an invisible sun and devastates the earth.

The shadow of the plane trees appears livid at my feet. I can distinguish scarcely anything on the ground but the pale heat. The birds are silent, the leaves are motionless, nothing seems to be breathing. I do not want to remain here before the house. I want to go farther, as far as the fir tree on the edge of the great lawn.

That is where, in former days, I used to play with Odile. To penetrate beneath that tree, we had to push aside the heavy, black branches. Gradually they returned to their places and imprisoned us in a sort of miraculous night; for all about us, through the foliage, we could see the daylight over the meadow, but in the spot where, hand in hand, we were standing delightedly, it was so dark that we could not distinguish the features in each other's face.

Since that time the fir tree has been struck several times by lightning and its wounds are multiple. Its shade no longer extends so far and the tree seems to lean to one side because, many years ago, two of its

topmost limbs were broken off; but its thick foliage still sweeps the ground and, on the days when the wind is strong, its powerful branches creak like a ship at sea.

I shall wait for her here. In a quarter of an hour I shall see my uncle's automobile appear under the plane trees and stop before the house. Odile will look about her, toward the fir tree, perhaps, but without knowing that I am here and watching for her. She will get out. Then mother will appear at the door and say:

"Kiss me, Odile. John has gone out for a walk, but he will be back soon."

I shall not stir. I shall listen to what Odile says, I shall not lose one of her gestures, and if she turns her head to the left or right, as though to look for me, it seems as if my heart will break with joy. I shall push aside the branches and run toward her, crying:

"I am here. I was hiding."

I saw her tonight on the staircase. I met her as I was going upstairs, but she did not hear me coming and it was too dark for her to see. So she was afraid and gave a cry, just as if some one had struck her in the dark.

Her face is whiter and thinner than it was this winter. She was panting a little when I reached her side and for a moment she could not speak. I should have remembered that she was ill; but no, I felt al-

most happy at having frightened her. It seems childish to say, but I was angry with her for not turning her head in my direction when she arrived with my uncle. Nevertheless, I seized her hands when I heard her cry out and I comforted her:

“Don’t be afraid, Odile! It is I.”

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We grew up together, she and I, and here we passed our childhood.

The house is old and spacious. Its brown-tile roof rises high above the plane trees, and the stone of its walls seems as white and clean as in the distant days of the last century when first they gradually rose before the prudent eyes of an architect who watched the expenses closely; for it was his family that its roof was to shelter and it was from a somewhat modest purse that he would have had to pay for the many useless ornaments which men of his profession usually consider indispensable. For that reason there are no entablatures above the windows, no balconies, no wrought-iron balustrades, and no corner ornamentation in a different stone at the angles of the house; but, from top to bottom, only a smooth, plain wall strikes the eye, and in place of balconies and balustrades there is a single iron bar solidly fastened in the stone of each window. That does not mean that the house has a morose appearance; quite the contrary. Its proportions are perfect. Everything about it is broad and well spaced, and over the

whole of the high façade the trees shed vague shadows which lend to it a mysterious life; a magnificent ornament, surely, and one which costs nothing.

My mother brought us both up. The granddaughter of the architect of whom I have spoken, she had never, since her birth, lived elsewhere; and at the death of her elder brother she had inherited the house. Like me, then, she grew up with the murmur of the plain in her ears and, also like me, she must have often trembled at the silence of the empty rooms.

From as far back as I can remember, I have always known her gentle and good, not gay, but not bitter, either, perpetually busy with little occupations which never left her the time to amuse me either by telling me stories or by taking me to walk. Doubtless, she thought that she did enough in that direction by giving me for a playmate little Odile, the only child of one of her cousins who had died; and each time she met us in her path she contented herself with saying, "Go play," with a gesture which I can still see. She put her hands together, palms inward, and then separated them rapidly a number of times with the fluttering, wavy motion a person would use to frighten sparrows. It mattered little, if she happened to pass through the room where we were, that we were sitting on the floor in the midst of our ninepins and lead soldiers; she always ordered us with the same gesture and the same words to go and play, without at the same time stopping or even

turning her head to look at us after she had passed. Both of us soon realized that she said it only to relieve her conscience, as if to make us understand that she was there and watching us; and we paid no more attention to it.

Our games were simple. One of our greatest joys was to slip into the parlor where no one ever went and, in that solemn room, to crawl on our hands and knees over the whole floor. We found it particularly agreeable because the immense carpet which covered the floor was extremely thick and soft. How many games of hide and seek we played behind the chairs with their coverings of white percale! How many cries we quickly stifled when we heard above our heads or in the neighboring room that step, at once busy and absent-minded, which we knew so well! Then when, tired by that exercise, we stretched out flat on our stomachs on the floor, we amused ourselves by examining the details of the carpet upon which we were lying and by following with our fingers its complicated figures. That carpet has long since disappeared from the room, but I looked at it too eagerly and attentively not to have in my mind even now an exact image of it. It was, I think, imitation Persian. The background was pale, of about the same shade as gray sand, but not particularly noticeable because it was almost hidden behind a forest of monstrous plants whose thick, strong stalks rose symmetrically like the branches of a candelabra; and there were tigers, jaguars, and many other ani-

imals whose names we did not know, all with fur of the brightest colors, crawling and bounding through that strange vegetation. But what were those people in the midst of the great mysterious plants? We could not see their feet, hidden as they were by the vegetation; but their strangely rich costumes—their turbans, their embroidered jackets, and their full trousers gathered by cords at the ankles—struck us with amazement. They all had the same little brown faces, the same black mustaches. Some were bending a bow almost as large as themselves; others were preparing to hurl a javelin at the red tigers and the blue panthers which were fleeing to escape their bolts.

I have never found out the exact meaning of this design, which was repeated in the carpet, with few variations, nearly twenty times; but it had in my eyes a singular character which I should have had considerable difficulty in defining. It seems to me now that it must have been something at the same time savage and sacred in the ancient Oriental design which pleased me so; sacred in the single attitude of those motionless hunters, all making the same gesture like priests in a ceremony, and savage also in the impassiveness of the little figures in the midst of the massacre.

And Odile? What did she think of those men and animals? On her knees like me, her hands in the thick carpet, she went slowly from one corner of the room

to the other. Her curly hair fell over both cheeks, almost, I thought, like the ears of a spaniel.

"Well," I would say, in order to stop her when she went too fast for me, "do you think that they will have enough arrows and javelins to kill all those animals?"

Or else, "Do you think people used to dress like that in those days?"

Odile shook her head in vain efforts to throw back the curls from her face. For a moment I caught a glimpse of her gray eyes looking at me beneath knit brows, and then her hair fell back about her cheeks like a curtain.

"I don't know," she said. "In the first place, they're not real people."

She was two years younger than I and she still spoke with a lisp which made me feel all my superiority. It was usually impossible for me to get from the little girl a different answer from the above, but one day, as I asked her again if there would be enough arrows and javelins, she seemed struck by that question she had heard so often before and she turned toward me.

"They're not shooting at the animals," said she.

I laughed. "Not at the animals? Why, yes, they are. It's a hunt, you know."

"No," she replied, "they're not looking at the animals; they're looking at us."

It was true. All those little eyes were fixed upon

us. A vague apprehension stirred within me and I gave a nervous laugh.

"After all, they're not shooting at us with their bows and arrows, are they?" I asked after a moment.

"Yes, they are," she said. "Only they're not real people."

And she resumed her journey, the toes of her shoes leaving behind her, as it were, a double wake in the nap of the thick carpet.

Strange little girl! For me, as for everybody else, she had that uncommunicative expression, that glance so full of secretiveness and, if sometimes she sufficiently forgot herself to tell me something which gave me an inkling of what was going on in her mind, it seemed like an inadvertence and I felt afterward that she was angry with me, as if I had committed an act of treachery. That was surely why she attracted me; I admired, without knowing exactly why, that precocious determination to withhold herself from the world's scrutiny.

I must now speak of another person who lived with us at Ferrière. I should be tempted to say that he never ought to have set foot in the house if I had not decided to leave it to the reader to form upon that point his own opinion.

When I think of Clement Jalon I almost always see him as he appeared on the morning when he first arrived at our house. That is undoubtedly because he hardly changed afterward in any way whatever; but, in any case, the impression which I received of

him that day was so strong and, so to speak, so violent in its distinctions, that it has never become erased from my memory. There was nothing especially remarkable, however, about the man's appearance. If there was anything surprising about him, it was neither in his dress nor in his features. How was it possible, then, that an inattentive child should have been struck speechless at the sight of him? I think that a novelist would probably speak of intuition; I limit myself merely to describing what I saw.

It was one morning in May or June, just before luncheon, when the noise of an automobile drew me to the window, that same window at which I am writing these lines. By leaning out a little I could perceive through the trees a little red car of a model which would seem very ridiculous today. It stopped. In it was a stout man who seemed very undecided; he remained for some time without making a move, his hands flat on the wheel and his head bowed. In the midst of the silence I suddenly heard my mother's voice crying from the top of the staircase:

"Well, what is it? Who is there?"

Then the man lifted his head as if he had been drawn from a deep revery and with an abrupt movement of his whole body he raised himself from his seat and climbed over the door of the little car.

At that moment I saw him just as he was—see him, I might say; for I should be willing to believe that he is here before my eyes like a ghost. He is not tall, but he is stout. He does not move, now that he is

on his feet; he is doubtless waiting for some one to approach him. That way he has of keeping his hands in the pockets of his gray jacket, of standing with his legs apart, his head a bit on one side, and his derby hat over one ear, standing off in the opposite direction to that in which he leans his head; is that what displeases me so? I must believe it. I cannot see his face, I have not yet heard his voice; but the single glance which I have given him is enough to make me hope that he will depart immediately.

My mother walked up to Jalon and took the hand he held out to her, welcoming him with a good grace which made me despair. I felt sick at heart. Without a word, I left Odile, who was playing with me, and went downstairs.

It is almost seventeen years since then, but the emotions of that day have again come to life within me and I am surprised to realize that I have forgotten nothing. How many memories lie dormant in us! All I have to do is to lean against this window sill, to let my hand touch once more this iron bar heated by the sunlight, and everything comes back to me, everything rises before me with the exactness of an apparition.

From the staircase, I could hear my mother answering Clement Jalon's questions. The poor woman was speaking in a hesitating manner which continually gave the impression that she was going to correct herself. I was much moved by her apparent agitation. She turned at the sound of my steps upon

the stone and, for the first time in my life, I saw on her face an expression of distress which, after that, was to appear often. It seemed to me that my presence comforted her a little, for she showed her teeth in a sort of smile; but her eyes remained haggard. I ran to her.

"My child," she began.

"My child," said the man, taking me under the arms and raising me as high as his head, "my name is Jalon and I am the cousin of your mamma. Do you understand?"

He had the throaty voice of the habitual smoker and drinker. As he held me in the air I had time to see his face and I closed my eyes.

"Why do you close your eyes?" he continued. "Are you dizzy? That's bad. You must get used to things like that. There."

He set me back on the ground, but so quickly that I thought he was letting me fall. Then he raised me still more rapidly than the first time and held me as far as he could reach above his head.

"Goodness! . . ." said mother.

"What are you afraid of?" asked Jalon, setting me down again. "You don't think I'll break him, do you? What's his name? My child, what's your name?" he repeated, leaning over to me, his hands on his thighs.

I looked at him. His face was heavy and thick, with long deep furrows. A nervous twitch made him blink his eyes too fast and too often. He wore long,

black side whiskers but the rest of his face was close shaven and his chin was shiny. I could not tell the color of his eyes.

"Come, come," he said, pressing my arm to encourage me.

I told him my name. He raised his head and asked mother:

"Was that his father's name?"

"His uncle's," she corrected, "my elder brother."

"That's right," said Jalon, straightening up. "I couldn't remember."

He blinked and drew from his pocket a pair of eyeglasses which he put on. They made him hideous. He looked for a moment at that part of the house which could be seen through the trees.

"My compliments," said he.

Mother bowed her head. There followed a moment of silence during which Jalon, his hands in his pockets, looked around him. Then we all went into the house. As I walked behind him and my mother, I noticed how delicate she appeared beside him.

Jalon lived with us from that day on. I cannot describe my impatience to see him depart; but one year passed and then another, and I said to myself sadly that the only way in which he would leave Ferrière would be, as the expression goes, feet first; for he seemed resolved to remain with us to the end of his days. I remember that he was in the habit of calling my mother "mamma," although he was not her

son, and I, by a habit acquired I do not know how, never called him anything else but "my uncle," although he was not my uncle but only a very distant relative of my father's. It was, moreover, characteristic of him to have become settled, if I may say so, in our family habits to such a degree that we gave him a name to which he had no right and that he had succeeded, with regard to my mother, in putting himself upon an equal footing with me. Had he not contrived to have her answer him "my son" or "my child" when he said "mamma"?

He certainly held my mother in awe of him. In the first place, without being very tall himself, he was much taller than she, and that explains a great deal. To speak to him she had to raise her head and then what did she see? A dark face thrown back, very black eyes which, given the position of the head, never looked at any one except from under the lids, a massive jaw, vigorous and aggressive, shaven twice a day, all blue and shining, which always seemed ready to bite. And what did he see? A little thin face raised timidly to his, with colorless eyes, filled with fear and the desire to please. The conversations between mother and Jalon were neither very long nor very frequent.

The most important one of the day took place in the morning, in the dining-room, where mother appeared, a little notebook in her hand and a nervous, kindly smile in her eyes and on her lips. She went straight up to Clement Jalon, who was standing be-

fore the fireplace, head thrown back and his hands clasped behind him under his coat tails.

"Today," she began, "we shall have trout." (Or some other kind of fish; I take this menu as an example.)

"Good," said Jalon, throwing his head a little further back.

"Roast pork and vegetables . . ."

"Excellent."

"A salad . . ." mother then said in a voice not quite so decided, for she knew that Jalon was not fond of salads; but she kept proposing the dish from time to time in the chimerical hope that one day it would appeal to him. There would be silence for a moment and for some time the fate of the salad remained doubtful. Then Jalon would sigh and take a deep breath.

"No salad, mamma," he said at last, "unless," he added in his throaty voice, putting on a mysterious expression, "unless it is to be tomato salad."

Mother bowed her head. She had never had success with tomatoes in the garden at Ferrière.

"Well," she said, putting the notebook behind her back like a child trying to recite his lesson loyally, "we might substitute cheese for the salad and end the meal with fruit."

"Fine," Jalon acquiesced without enthusiasm.

Then mother would smile again and go away to the kitchen.

At first, however, she and Jalon had several long

conversations, the subject of which I had to wait until I was sixteen to learn. I understood very well that they concerned one of those family secrets which people would allow themselves to be cut to pieces before divulging, which they keep as jealously as they watch over their portraits and their jewels and bequeath from one generation to another. Who, then, was this Clement Jalon and how did it happen that I had never heard his name before? To what did he owe it to be able to talk to us with so insolent a calmness and to warm himself at our fire as if he were the master of Ferrière, planting his armchair before the hearth and resting his feet on the andirons, while mother and I had to content ourselves with small places at his right and left?

Once it happened that I found mother with her eyes full of tears which she wiped away with a rapid gesture when she saw me.

"What are you doing here?" she said in an irritated tone I had never until then known her to use. "Go and play with Odile."

But playing with Odile did not amuse me as it had. I was nearly fifteen years old and she was only thirteen. As is well known, the difference between thirteen and fifteen is immense, whereas that between six and eight, for example, is nothing. This caused me to lose interest rather quickly in the little girl after having enjoyed myself so long in her company. Her silence and her obstinate ways which I used to admire now tired me; I realized that she bored me.

However, I was curious to know what she thought of Jalon and, as if she realized that it was the only way to arouse my curiosity and keep me interested in her, she was careful to be evasive on the subject.

One day, when the bad weather forced us to remain beside the fire, I made an effort, for I have never been amiable, to speak to her with somewhat more than my usual gentleness; but it was with the design of surprising what she tried to hide from me, and she understood it perfectly. She was, to tell the truth, more clever than I and my ruses must have seemed a bit simple to her.

We were alone in the dining-room. I remember that she was reading and that I was sitting on the floor almost at her feet, thoughtfully poking the embers of the fire.

“What are you reading?” I asked after a while.

She held out the book to me without a word. I pretended to look at the title.

“Do you enjoy it here at Ferrière?” I said. “Are you happy?”

I asked her that because I did not know how to bring the conversation around to that other subject about which she would never talk.

“Why do you want to know?” she answered with a suspicious air. “Of course I’m happy!”

“Wouldn’t you be happier if Jalon didn’t live with us?”

She looked at me. How pretty she must have been at that moment, her face reddened by the fire, her

pale hair shining like a motionless flame about her cheeks and forehead. But I had seen her too often to be affected by her beauty.

"If your uncle did not live with us?" she asked.

Perhaps she said "your uncle" to offend me. She herself always arranged it so that she never had to pronounce Clement Jalon's name, and if she happened to address him she called him "sir." As I remained silent, hurt by the way in which she had spoken to me, she said, simply:

"He is not one to prevent me from being happy if I wish to be."

She resumed her reading and I got nothing more from her.

What a joy it would have been, however, to have been able to talk frankly with her and to tell her the grudge I had against that stout man! It seemed as if I could not stand it any longer to keep to myself all the vexation which his presence aroused in me. Sometimes I imagined that she shared my feelings toward him; something in her expression made me think so, a look she had given him. But an instant later she destroyed my illusions by smiling at my enemy and asking him some of those stupid questions which form the basis of so much of the conversation of grown-up people, the turn of which she caught with that talent of imitation which almost all little girls possess:

"Have you spent a nice day, sir?"

Then Jalon laughed to make fun of her and she

laughed with him. Why did she do it? Couldn't she guess what a feeling of hatred that game caused in me? When I heard them laughing that way, watching me at the same time out of the corners of their eyes, it seemed to me that my sight became obscured, and in the fury which seized me I confused their two faces, the radiant beauty of the one and the absurd ugliness of the other; and their voices echoed in my ears with a strange sound, at once deafening and far away. And soon I became aware of my own voice, a bit hoarse, replying docilely to Jalon's questions and saying "uncle" to that man who was not my uncle and whom I should have joyfully seen dead.

Could I have told at that moment how I felt toward Odile? She certainly irritated me to such a degree that it seemed as if I could willingly have slapped her, struck her, and knocked her to the ground; but if I suffered so much from the gaiety which she excited in Jalon, was it not because I saw growing up between them a sort of complicity? To see her on good terms with that man, even for a moment, what a humiliation for me! And, nevertheless, when she was alone, reading or sewing, I rarely had the idea of speaking to her, for when I was alone with her she bored me.

In any case, I do not wish to lead my reader through the whole labyrinth of these complicated sentiments, and the facts which I am about to relate are in themselves more eloquent than any commentaries I could make upon the subject. The one thing

certain is that I was afraid of Jalon; I was afraid of him because he was so strong and his hands so large. Besides, why should I not be frank? At that time I was a coward, I trembled easily; I was afraid, for example, of the dark.

Jalon sometimes invited me to go out riding with him. I might easily have refused; but strange as it may appear, I accepted. Is it not strange, indeed, to accept the invitations of a person one detests? Nevertheless, that is what happened once or twice a week. The little red automobile carried us off, in the winter as well as in the summer, across the beautiful countryside which I so loved to look at from my window. Never did Clement Jalon take a step which was not absolutely necessary; he walked slowly, heavily, and with a certain difficulty which made me think that he suffered from gout. Seated in his car, however, he was very different, for then he was at ease. His great hands, which were thrust into the pockets of his coat like useless instruments when he was on his feet, reappeared, once he was in his car, and became animated with a new life; they turned keys and took off brakes with an agility to which I was not accustomed. I remember it all so clearly that I can imagine that I see them; they seemed hardly to touch the wheel and, although they looked large enough to break iron bars, they gave at those moments a strange impression of delicacy. I do not need to say that he drove remarkably well and that he never went so fast that he could not, if he wished,

stop as promptly as the brakes and engines of that period permitted. The sort of agility which his machine gave him compensated in large measure for the heavy, ungainly manner with which he moved when he was on his feet and, as a result, his generally taciturn humor disappeared on these rides and he became less supercilious and more affable.

A glance out of the corner of his eye was always sufficient to force me to answer him when he spoke to me and, if the sound of my words was lost in the wind—which often happened, for we did not loiter on the road—he gave an impatient growl and ordered me to raise my voice in the way he did to make myself heard. Of these shouting conversations I have a confused, but not disagreeable, recollection. At first it irritated me to have to talk of things which I should have preferred to keep to myself—what I thought of Odile, for example, a question often repeated, which I remember best; but afterward the violence he did my inclinations ceased to displease me entirely and I did not find it so embarrassing to have to shout that Odile certainly had beautiful eyes but that she bored me. It comforted me to speak that way. Often, even, excited by the sounds of my own voice, I let myself be drawn on to say almost anything; I shouted lies and invented sentiments which I had never felt, the violence of which never failed to surprise me at the time.

“I hope,” I would sometimes say, “that Odile has some other relatives besides us who will soon take

charge of her. I cannot understand why she should remain on our hands until she marries."

Even today I am at a loss to imagine where I got the idea that Odile could have any other relatives, in view of the fact that my mother had told me many times that she was alone in the world; but the quarrelsome tone I affected comforted me strangely. I undoubtedly felt in it a sort of revenge for all the pain which Odile's silence had made me suffer.

To these remarks Jalon did not make any real replies, but he sometimes shrugged his shoulders good-naturedly. I have never understood exactly what interest he took in hearing me talk; perhaps he scarcely listened to me. I am inclined to think that, being able only with difficulty to stand solitude, he took me with him on his rides almost as he would have taken a dog if he had had one; and he made me talk, I think, for the same reason that he would have pinched the ear of his spaniel, in order that a living being might reveal his presence at his side by some sort of sound. I do not say this to blame him, for I myself have a horror of solitude and the same need of feeling a living being close beside me. Moreover, I should have had great difficulty in finding in Jalon's character, or at least in what I could understand of it at that time, a trait sufficiently black to justify the hatred which I had for him; and, since I am on the subject, I hasten to add that, by a disconcerting peculiarity, I detested Jalon only at certain moments and under special circumstances.

I noticed it one day when we came back from a ride. My memory is so constituted that I can recall no event of a mental order without immediately the circumstances which accompanied it returning to my mind. Thus I can see myself getting out of Jalon's little red automobile one autumn morning, a poplar branch in my hand. I remain motionless a moment beside the small iron fountain where the birds come to drink after a rain. I am looking at a red leaf floating on the surface of the water and, with my nail, stripping from my poplar branch the moist and tender bark. Twenty thoughts pass through my mind.

"Why," I say to myself, "do I go out to ride with Jalon if I dislike him so?"

And immediately I answer my own question:

"But I don't dislike him as much as all that."

"What!" that other speaker exclaims with surprise and irritation, in a voice which echoes within me, "you don't dislike Jalon? Just lift your eyes and see who is approaching him!"

Then I raise my eyes and I see Odile, in the little white percale dress which she made herself, coming in my direction. She is so pretty that it makes me want to laugh with joy; but she gives me merely a passing glance and it is that ridiculous and ignoble Jalon, groaning as he climbs heavily out of his car, whom she comes to greet. Immediately I become red, my heart begins to beat violently, and I feel at the same moment that familiar oppressive feeling, the

cause of which has seemed so mysterious to me up to this moment, when suddenly it is revealed. Now, at last, I understand what strange things may enter into the relations of three human beings.

This little girl is indifferent to me when she is alone and I should not turn my head to see her or speak to her; I also know that an hour passed with Clement Jalon amuses rather than irritates me. However, as soon as Odile and that man are in each other's presence a change occurs and they become transformed into different beings whose every gesture is odious to me. I hear the throb of the blood in the veins behind my ears. Both of them are before me like people in a dream; their expressions and their words are no longer like the expressions and the speech of living beings. What has happened? I see them no longer as they should be, their features have become confused. One would say that they have masks and are playing a rôle. But I do not budge from the place where at first surprise and, afterward, fear command me to remain.

The sort of enchantment which holds me motionless does not last, however. After the first anguish there comes to me something like a sudden and violent energy. I do not speak, but within me all is tumult; I do not open my mouth, but a sort of continual roar which I alone can hear swells and reverberates in my brain. What is the matter with me, in my turn? Nothing. Those cries, that violence, do not come from me. I am foreign to the fury which makes my hands

tremble, which heats my face until the perspiration pours down my cheeks; but I am more afraid of it than I should be of the rage of another, for I cannot either dominate it or escape from it. It is there, more and more imperious, its angry roar sounding like the voice of some demon. I must submit to it and obey it. I must strike when it wills that I strike and I must allow it to liberate itself; for I am like a prison which is too small for the monstrous prisoner it holds within it, who could cause its walls to rock with one move of his massive shoulders.

I must, then, yield, for I am at the limit of my endurance. At this moment I exist only to tremble. I am the flesh of an invisible, articulate something which will not allow me to resist it. Have you never heard the blood sing in your head when you had a fever? It is a tiny, nasal voice which never rises a single note but gayly tells long stories. My blood, on the other hand, howls as it courses through my body; its swell rises and falls in my head with a terrible sound, like the cries of a man falling into an abyss or about to be engulfed in the sea.

I feel dizzy and try to close my eyes; but what is my will at present? I cannot close them. On the contrary, I watch Odile as I have never watched anyone in my life. She is not two yards away. The wind raises her hair a little and reveals her neck. In the mental whirlwind in which I find myself, I keep enough lucidity to note quite small details. A little while ago, my sight was troubled, but now it seems

as if it had never been so keen or sharp. The little blue vein under the skin, behind her ear, how slender it is! It is like the stalk of a flower. And one would say that the sunlight which plays upon her cheeks was created just for this moment, to shine upon the face of that little girl. She is so lovely that I wonder if I exist. And at the same instant I hear the monster within me cry something which I can understand:

“She is yours. Take her!”

“Take her” means press, crush in your hands that face, that throat, that flesh in which the blue vein is palpitating. All that belongs to you, those eyes which are looking at some one else, those lips that speak to him.

My torture is too great. My body obeys me no longer; my hand rises of itself. I take a step forward and a kind of tumultuous applause reëchoes within me, like that of a great mass of people who are weary of waiting and see finally their desire gratified.

What is happening? Jalon takes one look at me and stops talking, while the little girl, in the same way that one sees in a mirror what is taking place behind one, reads confusion on his features. She turns toward me unafraid. She is calm, not even surprised. Her glance is no longer that of a child; it is deep and hard and the pupils of her eyes have become quite black. If there were not this silence, I should think that she were speaking to me, but it is an extraordinary silence which extends over every-

thing and I hear nothing more within me or about me. Life is suspended, as in the hour which precedes the day, when the sleeper awakens, frightened by the sound of his own breathing in the supernatural peace of the hours of dawn. What is he saying to me? It seems to me that the day is becoming dark, that everything is giving way and vanishing abruptly behind her; and I see nothing but a white face, trembling as in the depths of a river, and two somber eyes with fixed and staring glance.

A little later I fell ill. It was nothing very serious, but, nevertheless, I had to remain in bed over two months. Life resembles books sometimes and undertakes itself to effect the transition between two periods. So it is that I compare these two months of inertness to the space between two chapters; but, just as in a book, that space is full of things of which the author does not speak, in the same way, one will see that I recovered my health under very different circumstances from those under which I became ill.

Mother spent the greater part of the day beside me. My condition had frightened her, and as she was naturally excitable, she did not soon recover from the alarm which I had at first caused her. Until the last hours of my convalescence, she remained in my room, as if she were afraid of some sort of sudden and irremediable relapse due to my being obliged to pick up for myself a pillow which had fallen to the floor or to my having to make an effort to reach

a glass of water which had been placed too far away from me. I realized for the first time the depths of her love, from the way in which she incessantly bothered me. It often happened that she gave me a fever, and her advice did me almost as much harm as the medicine which she forced me to take. Later, she went back to the absent-minded manners of former days and I to my independence; but so long as I was ill her zeal knew no bounds and left me no rest from dawn till dark.

There was one strange thing, difficult, doubtless, to imagine; she never let me sleep in the daytime. It frightened her to see me lying with my head thrown back and my eyes closed. So, on the days when I had slept little or badly the night before, and in the morning light was enjoying that delicious drowsiness which precedes sleep, mother, with an anxious hand, pulled at my sleeve:

“John, John, what is the matter with you? You are dozing. Don’t you feel well?”

My immobility set her beside herself. She thought that I was going to die and, in order to calm her apprehension, she talked in a very loud voice and brought me back in that way to conscious life.

I often tricked her. I would ask her to read to me, knowing well that she would consent and that she would sit nowhere else but in the sort of bay which the window formed in the thick walls of the house. In fact, it was the only place where anyone could see well enough to read, because, for fear that too

bright a light would hurt my eyes, mother always drew the curtains before the window; and thus, if she wanted to use her eyes, she had to place her chair in the sort of nook between the window and the figured curtains. Thus hidden, she found it impossible to watch me and I made the most of that fact by enjoying a sleep which, if it is true that I was very careful not to let myself lose consciousness entirely, was none the less delightful and refreshing. My little trick was never discovered, for I always opened my eyes exactly at the ends of chapters, recalled infallibly to myself by the pause which mother always made at that point in her reading.

But, if I wish to carry this story beyond my childhood, that is sufficient and I must make haste; the hours are passing and the day is not far from its close. It will be cold here after dark and I shall not remain at Ferrière. I shall go to the town. I shall leave this room with its cracking floor which makes me start, even in the midst of the sunlight which I see upon my hands and feel upon my face.

I have said that great changes took place during my illness. The principal one was that, having taken to my bed a child, I was a man when I came back to health. That is not a figure of speech; the confinement which I had been forced to undergo bore its fruit. It lessened my impatience and humbled my vanity by submitting me to the orders and even the caprices of a mother whom I loved without respecting; in brief, it chastened all the turbulent and

youthful qualities which I possessed. I was just entering my sixteenth year.

Did my mother realize something of this transformation? I noticed that her attitude toward me was no longer the same. She spoke to me in a different tone from the one with which I was familiar, asking my advice on this and that and listening to my answers. One day she declared abruptly that she had troubles and that I was old enough to be admitted to her confidence.

"You will have to hear them sooner or later and there is no reason why you should not know everything now."

And she told me the story of Clement Jalon and how that man, who she was willing to believe was a relative of ours, had set about it to take up his permanent residence in our house.

"Just imagine," she explained, "that he is probably the cousin of the Pascalis of Nantes. That does not mean much to you, for you have never seen a Pascalis in your life, nor have I, either, for that matter; but in any case, they are related to your father's family and I remember that he sometimes used to speak of them before the trouble. I wrote the Pascalis two years ago, but I got no answer. That was not so strange; Jalon told me one day that they had left Nantes to settle in Spain and that he had lost touch with them entirely."

"Hadrn't you ever heard of Jalon before he came here?"

"Yes," mother replied, "I had."

She reflected an instant and added: "At least, I believe so."

I was on the point of asking her how she could have welcomed him to her house without assuring herself that he was not an impostor, but she seemed to guess what I was going to say and at once resumed:

"What could I do? How could I help it? I am not in the habit of turning away the unfortunate. He told me that he had had financial reverses and that in his youth he had been a friend of your father's. That was more than was necessary to make me sympathetic."

"And what if it weren't true?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Don't you think that I have asked myself all those questions? I say to myself that, if it is possible that he lied, it is also possible that he told the truth. After all, why couldn't he have been a friend of your father's? The more I think of it the more it seems to me that your father used to speak of him."

She sighed.

"Well, so much the worse," she said, after a moment of silence. "He is here and I am not the woman to turn a man of his size out of the house. Then, too, you don't realize. Every time I remonstrate with him, he finds a way to talk to me about your father and that makes me feel like crying. He always wins out in the end."

"Remonstrate, mamma? I never heard you remonstrate with Jalon in my life."

"My child, you must understand that I do not talk to him before you. Until this moment, at least, I have never thought that it would do any good. But the day is not far off when you will be able to help me."

My curiosity with regard to mother's troubles was not so great as the fear of finding myself, through what she was going to tell me of them, in some disagreeable situation. That is not, perhaps, a very laudable sentiment. Nevertheless, I remained silent and avoided her eyes in order to discourage confidences as far as possible. But she continued, clasping her hands with great solemnity:

"The day is not far off when my son can say to Clement Jalon, 'You can intimidate us no longer. You are going to leave Ferrière.'"

She rose as she said that and fixed her eyes on mine. The unhappy woman was even weaker and more cowardly than I with Jalon. Many things became clear to me when I saw her standing there in front of my bed, her eyes flashing with anger; I understood that, in Jalon's presence, she held back marvelously well that indignation which was now sending the blood to her cheeks, but that now, since he was not present, she was giving free course to her resentment and relieving herself in a single outburst of all the hatred which had been so long pent up within her.

“‘You are going to leave Ferrière,’” she repeated in a louder voice, continuing to play the rôle she wanted to see me undertake and pointing her finger at me as if I were Jalon. “‘You have taken advantage long enough of my mother’s good nature, her credulity, and her weakness. Five long years you have been permitted to live here and have your own way, concerned only with your comforts, your meals, and your cigars, never giving my mother a cent of that money which you continually promised, but, on the contrary, not hesitating to extort from her large sums which you afterward lost, according to your statements, in unfortunate speculations. . . .’”

I listened to this strange speech without a word. It was so little in character for my mother to speak in that way that a sudden embarrassment seized me. I did not dare to look at her and I kept my eyes lowered for a moment. Her artificial eloquence and dramatic facial expressions made her excessively ridiculous and gave me a cruel feeling of humiliation. Putting my hands to my face, I found that it was burning hot. Two mortal minutes passed. Like many people who lack sufficient will power, mother continued to speak either because she no longer knew when to stop or because, perhaps knowing, she was no longer mistress of her tongue; and, in her excitement, she said at present things which she would regret before the setting of the sun.

“‘Your conduct is infamous, sir,’” she continued. “‘You ought to know how dishonorable it is for a

man to extort money from a widow who has no one to protect her, a woman whom you terrorize, who does not even dare to address you, she is so afraid of your violence and your brutal ways.' ”

At that moment I saw only her blue serge skirt and her two wrinkled hands waving about in front of me. Then she made an absurd gesture, which revealed all the wretchedness of her soul and all the childish timidity which formed so important a part of her character. Continuing to apostrophize an imaginary Clement Jalon, she exclaimed:

“I have had enough. It does you no good to frown and raise your voice; you are no longer dealing with a woman and you do not frighten me. You will leave Ferrière immediately. Go!”

But to give more authority to that injunction, the weakness of which she herself realized, she spread out her hands in the same way that she used to do when she ran across me in the house and told me to go and play. I saw that gesture, those hands, fluttering about as if they would frighten sparrows; and I burst into an irrepressible nervous laugh which bent me double on my bed.

There is something terrible in the fact that we can change nothing which has once happened. As long as a gesture is in the future and, as it were, *before* us, we can choose to make it or not, as we desire; but if, by the unjust magic of time, it passes *behind* us and we have once made it, that is sufficient for it to be henceforth irreparable. A second sooner

it would have perhaps been easy to prevent everything; now, the greatest power on earth is as nothing before that thing forever unchangeable. If I were a believer, I think that I would seek in my heart for a prayer against time. I should pray to God:

“Lord, do not suffer this to have taken place; do not permit that I shall have laughed at the distress of this unhappy woman.”

But, nevertheless, I had laughed so loud that mother stopped speaking, and her silence, far from putting an end to my gaiety, only exasperated it the more. I can still hear the kind of hiccough which I could not entirely smother under the covers. It became so shocking and so painful that I wondered if such a thing could really be and if I were not the unconscious victim of a nightmare; but at every moment the sound of my voice gave me a new proof of the reality of the scene. Mother suddenly dropped on her knees before me and, burying her face in my bedclothes, began to weep. At once my laughter ceased.

After a moment, mother raised her head, and when she spoke it was with a firmness which surprised me:

“My child, you would not laugh at me if you knew the reason for my speaking so.”

She wiped her eyes and, rising, sat down on the foot of my bed. Now she seemed more calm.

“It is very simple of me to count upon you,” she continued. “You are still too young. And besides, Jalon is stronger than we can ever hope to be. He

has against me, against us, awful weapons which he can use at any time he wishes. I am provoked because he borrows money of me which he will never repay; but, if he wished, he could demand our whole fortune and have it in his hands within the hour. Do you understand, wretched little boy? He could drive you from that very bed where you are lying if he took the fancy, and you would be unable to protest. I was mad to think that you would speak to him bravely. We are not brave, my child, either you or I. And then, it would be of no use to speak to that man. Do you know why? Do you want to know why?"

I was astounded and made no reply.

"Well, I will tell you," she said, with a chilling calmness. "You are going to hear a secret which I did not expect to confide to you until later. But, as things are at present, no humiliation can be greater than those I have already suffered. You must know, then, that in your father's family something once happened which was so shameful that I really cannot find words to describe it."

And, in fact, she stopped and lowered her eyes as if to collect her thoughts.

"It is a long story. I shall tell you only the essentials. One of your uncles—I shall not say which one—needed a considerable amount of money for a business enterprise he said he was about to undertake. That was nearly six years before you were born, my boy, and your father and I had not been married

two years. At the time your father was making much-needed repairs on Ferrière, for your grandfather had never troubled himself about the bad condition of the roof and the woodwork and I have often told you that the day after I was married I almost broke my leg in the attic where the rain had rotted the floor."

Another moment of silence.

"So, then," she resumed, "almost all the money we had was then being applied to the repairs. That is true, I swear it. If anyone ever tells you the contrary, remember that your mother swore to the truth of what she told you. That uncle of yours lived in Paris. He came here and asked us to lend him seventeen thousand francs. It was a lot of money, my child, and it was enormous for your father, who had not at that time the fortune which his business later brought him. He refused, especially since it had just come to his ears that the enterprise his brother described was only a pretext to find money and that there were no real plans on foot to assure its success. But your uncle was a man concerned only with his pleasures, and people of that sort have few conscientious scruples. He swallowed his anger as well as he could and for some months we heard nothing more from him, when, one day in July, 1888, we learned that he had disappeared. The next day your father received a letter from Nantes, from Mr. Pascalis. He was an important business man, a distant relative of your father's, and, more than a relative,

a good friend, a very good friend. This Mr. Pascalis informed us that he had given your uncle the sum agreed upon and that, although he was not really in pressing need of it, he would be pleased if your father could reimburse him within the next six months.

“Imagine our feelings when we read that letter! Your father wrote to Mr. Pascalis immediately for an explanation. Mr. Pascalis, much astonished, answered that he had in his possession a letter which your father had written him two weeks before in which he was asked to give your uncle a sum which would be repaid by your father himself in the shortest possible time. Amazement! Your father immediately wrote again to Mr. Pascalis to beg him to send him the letter, which could not be anything but a forgery. Mr. Pascalis refused, saying that he would keep it, as well as some others which he had, as the only security he possessed for the money which he had loaned.

“This lack of confidence struck your father like a lash of a whip in the face. He packed his valise and went to Nantes to expostulate with this Pascalis. Things got worse. Mr. Pascalis went into a terrible rage and showed the supposed letter. Your father almost fainted when he examined that masterpiece of knavery. He could have sworn that it was his writing if the extravagant contents of the letter had not proved the contrary. He lost his temper in his rage, and he exclaimed that he would not pay a

cent and that it was not his fault if imbeciles let themselves be taken in so easily. Mr. Pascalis replied that your father would pay every last cent unless he wished the business to become common property and for people everywhere to say that he and his brother were a pair of rascals in collusion with each other to swindle the most respectable family in Nantes. In short, these two men, furious at being so duped, hurled terrible insults at each other and separated with mutual threats. Your father rushed to the station to take the first train for home.

"On the platform he saw the light of reason; he did not wait for the train, but dashed back to his enemy's house. Better negotiate before the irreparable happened. How much would he have to pay to have the letter? Pascalis answered that he could have it for the same amount of money which had been given to your uncle. Mr. Pascalis was pitiless where money was concerned and no personal considerations would have stopped him from pursuing his vengeance with vindictive joy to the very end. Your father knew that only too well. He at once signed a check in exchange for which Pascalis gave up the letter. Your father paid thirty-five thousand francs to get that piece of paper, for you may well guess that your uncle had not hesitated to ask all he wanted. He brought the letter back with him to Ferrière but I did not have the courage to read it. We burned it together, he and I, sobbing like two children."

Mother blew her nose and continued:

“Your father spent six years in accumulating that money again. You are too young to understand the privations which it meant for us, but, at the same time, that was not the most provoking part of it. Your uncle was as artful as he was wicked, and he had prepared his coup with all the care imaginable. To prevent Pascalis from conceiving the slightest suspicion, he asked him for the money only after he had sent him two or three letters informing him of the enterprise I mentioned, an enterprise which really, as you know, had no basis in fact. Pascalis’s replies, addressed, of course, to Ferrière, were intercepted by a servant whom your uncle had bribed and I found out that the latter came secretly to Fontaines, where our post office is, and that it was there he wrote his horrible letters. So, when Pascalis received the last, the one your father bought at such a price, he was not over surprised. When your uncle arrived at the time he had fixed, Pascalis was waiting for him. He gave him the money; they lunched together and your uncle disappeared. I leave you to think of the skill with which the wretch had forged not only your father’s signature, but also his very ways of expressing himself. Only an expert could have recognized it as a forgery. But what poisoned your father’s life to the day of his death, my boy, and what still makes me shudder when I think of it, was the existence of those other letters which, in his mental state at the time, he did not think to buy with the other. Just fancy! He did not even see them. He

was in such a hurry to have the most important one! It gave us an idea of what the others probably contained, but is it possible to imagine all that your uncle could have invented? Of course, your father moved heaven and earth to get his hand on all the correspondence. He returned to Nantes and begged Pascalis to give him the letters. Pascalis replied that they were lost, he did not know what he had done with them, that they had surely been destroyed. Your father offered money for them. Pascalis asked if he thought he was a blackmailer and showed him the door. What a cross to bear, what a purgatory for your unhappy father this whole affair was! It killed him, my child. In the delirium just preceding his death he kept imploring Pascalis to give him the other letters. I had to close the doors and windows and send away the servants. Everyone would have known about it. . . .”

She was silent for a moment.

“And what became of my uncle?” I asked.

“Your uncle? We were told that he had gone and settled in Central America, but I never believed it. I don’t believe that he ever left the country; I think he is still in France under another name. He had nothing to fear. He knew well how things would turn out. Naturally people did not fail to say that your father had forced him to leave the country by refusing him money. And he had to remain silent and do nothing to vindicate himself. We could not dishonor our name to justify our conduct, could we?

We did not even dare to dismiss the servant your uncle had bribed; he died here. As for Jalon, I don't know who he is. I have made inquiries, with every precaution, of course, but all to no purpose. I have heard that the Pascalis left the country four years ago. Jalon says he is a relative of theirs. It is possible, after all; and, consequently, it is also possible that he is familiar with the whole story I have just told you. Do you know the first thing he said when he saw me?

"'Madam, I am the cousin of Bernard Pascalis, of Nantes.'

"I thought I would die of shock when I heard that. How do we know that he hasn't your uncle's letters in his possession? And how can you expect me to refuse anything at all to a man who can, if he wishes, make people point us out in scorn as thieves?"

"You're not sure that he has the letters?"

"No, my child, but just to think that it is possible is quite sufficient to keep me awake nights. For years I haven't slept five hours in succession. I tremble every time Jalon speaks to me. You must have noticed it?"

"Mamma, what have you done to make sure whether he has the letters or not?"

"One day when he was out," she answered, slowly, "I opened every drawer in his bureau with a master key. I found nothing."

"What about his pockets?"

Mother gave me a sharp look.

"Jalon's pockets? How do you suppose I can search his pockets?" she said with a sudden volubility.

"Why, at night, when he is asleep. He sleeps so soundly."

"Well," she replied with an effort, "I did that too. Three years ago, I went into his room about two o'clock in the morning. It was in the winter. I don't know why I didn't die of fright. Just imagine the months and months of anguish I went through before I was able to make up my mind to do it. The idea of my stealing like a thief into Jalon's room! A year in advance I fixed the day when I would do it. The weeks passed, and as the day approached, I thought that I should go mad. I could not eat or drink. Do you remember the time you found me in tears? That was the day, my child. You may think that it would have been simple enough to put it off till later if I felt so little courage. More than once the idea tempted me, but . . . how can I explain it? . . . I didn't have the courage to put it off. I felt I was at the end of my endurance and that, although I had little enough courage to go through with it at the time, I should have even less if I put it off till later. Besides, when a person has waited so long to do a thing, he has only one idea in his head and that is to do it and be finished with it.

"That night I made believe that I was going to bed earlier than usual, on the pretext that I had a headache; but, when Jalon had retired for the night I

went downstairs again to the dining-room and drank a little brandy. You know how I detest alcohol, but I had to have something to stimulate me. I remained two hours beside the fire until it finally went out. It was then probably about half-past twelve. I took a little more brandy. My head was swimming. Then I went up and sat down on the staircase close to the man's room. He was snoring. I heard him distinctly. The brandy had given me a headache and I said to myself:

“ ‘I'm intoxicated. I must wait a little while to get over it.’

“My child, it was just as if I were going to commit a crime, a murder. I must have waited an hour. Then I got up, went up the five or six stairs which separated me from Jalon's room, and opened the door. That took me in all a good quarter of an hour.

“Of course, I had no light. I got down on my hands and knees and I felt my way along the floor without a sound. It was so dark that I could not see a single thing, not even the furniture. I couldn't find the chair where Jalon's coat would be and I made the mistake of turning around and going back. Have you ever been in a pitch-dark room? If once you change your direction, you are lost. In a few minutes I no longer had any idea just where in the room I was; I didn't even know where the door was. The night was very dark. Impossible, from my position on the floor, to make out the window. Evidently I should have chosen a moonlight night, but the idea had not

occurred to me; I am not a burglar. I stretched out on the carpet and rested a moment, for my excitement was taking my strength and my heart was beating so loudly that I was afraid of fainting. I decided that, when I felt a little better, I would stand up; perhaps I could find my way more easily.

“So, after a few minutes, I got up and took two or three steps forward. Jalon’s snoring showed me where the bed was and I calculated from that about where the chair which I sought would be; but I made two mistakes. The first time I struck an armchair and I realized I was on the wrong side of the bed and that I should have to go all around it. Fortunately, I had not wakened Jalon. So, with all the care that you can imagine, I went around to the other side of the bed. Once there, I stretched out my hand. The end of my fingers touched cloth and I seized it joyfully. But it was not, as I thought, Jalon’s coat, my child; it was the blanket on his bed. I was sure that I had touched his foot. I gave an involuntary sigh of terror and let go the blanket.

At that moment Jalon awoke. Can you realize what I suffered during the following minutes? I heard that man turning over and over in his bed; then I heard him moving several things on the nightstand, as if he were searching for something. I realized later what it was but at that moment I wasn’t thinking of anything, I was so afraid. Then there was a long silence. I held my breath and didn’t move. Jalon remained motionless; I could scarcely hear the sound of his

breathing. He must have been waiting, too. Finally, after some time, he began to snore again.

"I remained where I was for a while, at the same time stretching out my hands around me to the right and left, not to find the chair but rather to get some idea of how to reach the door; and suddenly my fingers struck the chair and the garment I was no longer seeking. It seemed, my child, as if I had touched Jalon's back and shoulders. Mercy upon me! What anxiety poor thieves must experience! I finally gained a little courage and ventured to put my hands in the pockets of the coat, since I had found it. In one there was a pair of glasses, in another a pocket knife, a pencil, and a toothpick; in still another a tobacco pouch and a pipe, but not a trace of a pocket-book either in the inside pockets or the outside. That made me angry. I went down on one knee to go through them once more. It would be too stupid to have given myself so much anxiety and made such an effort to no purpose."

Mother stopped and wiped her eyes.

"Did you find something at last?" I asked impatiently.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Can't you guess what happened?" she continued. "Well, I was there, feeling about in the pockets of that coat, when suddenly the snoring ceased and I heard the sound of a match gently scratched upon its box. I turned toward the bed and there was Jalon looking at me. I was so frightened that I could not

make a sound. He was silent. He had seen me examining his pockets, that was certain; but he did not say a word. You cannot realize how terrible he appeared to me at that moment. All I could see in the dark was his face and his eyes fixed upon me. He seemed perfectly calm. After a few seconds he dropped his eyes to the match and saw that it was about to burn his fingers. Then he looked me straight in the eye one last time and blew out the match; but first, and almost at the same time, he winked at me. I don't know how I got out of that room. Instinct, doubtless, found my way for me. I ran to my room like mad, threw myself on my bed, and wept until dawn."

She added:

"You see he had been pretending to be asleep in order to catch me. What he was trying to find on the nightstand was his box of matches."

And she was silent. Long minutes passed without either one of us attempting to speak. Mother was entirely absorbed by her thoughts and I, for my part, was overcome with emotion at the idea that she, naturally so timid, had been able, as it were, to create the courage which she lacked and conquer a fear to which I should have succumbed twenty times. The tears came to my eyes for a moment. Then I said abruptly:

"When I am well again, I will try in my turn."

She put her arms around me and answered earnestly:

"No, my child. I don't want you to. You may be

sure that if Jalon really has those letters he has guessed that they were what I was after. It was not his money that I wanted, was it? His money! He has not a cent in his pocket that he does not owe to me. Besides, he has never asked me for any explanation, either then or later. That is proof enough that he understood perfectly."

"Hasn't he ever alluded to what happened?"

"Not once, and it is even worse, I assure you, than if he openly threatened me. You are too young to understand just how deep he is. If I were not certain that I had gone to his room that night, I could believe that I dreamed it, for Jalon's attitude has never varied in the slightest from what it was before. That is where he is strong. When he needs money, he has the impudence to talk to me about your father. I don't know whether he thinks that it intimidates or moves me. At such times he is pleasant to me, he speaks nicely, but his eyes tell quite another story. It is as if they said, as they gaze at me:

"Remember the time when we saw you on your knees in our room by the light of that slowly burning match.'"

"You imagine that, mamma," I said to reassure her.

"Not at all," she returned vehemently. "I told you just now that a day would come when you could put that man out of the house but it is not true; that day will never come. Jalon will live here as if it were his home until the end of his days."

And she began to weep again.

"Mamma," I said, after a moment, "it would be better to speak quite frankly to him, to offer him money for those letters and end this nightmare once for all."

She stopped weeping and looked up.

"And what if he hasn't them? What if he never heard of them? I should be informing him, shouldn't I? I should be saying to him: 'What, you never heard of the attempt to swindle your cousin, Pascalis? He lost thirty-five thousand francs through a forged letter and, if my husband had not been so honest, the numskull would still be searching for them, his thirty-five thousand francs.' My poor child!"

"I am sure," I said again, "that there is a law against that kind of blackmail."

"A law! a law!" mother answered in exasperation. "Do you think Jalon is an imbecile? Don't you realize that he has never written the smallest word, or made the slightest threat? We have no witnesses, no proofs. We are at his mercy, do you understand?"

I was filled with rage at the thought of our powerlessness.

"Very well," I thought. "One day I will kill him."

Deep waters flow silently. The plan which I had conceived developed in me little by little, quietly. Considering the impossible situation in which that man had placed us, the simplest thing to do was to kill him; and the only thing to decide was what means

I should employ. I resolved to think that over long and carefully.

A few days after this conversation with my mother, I got up. My illness had certainly weakened me, but, as I have already explained, I felt like a different person. My plan to commit murder was maturing me. I saw clearly in myself and I knew that, at the moment when the idea had first come to me to kill Clement Jalon, I had not been afraid. My heart certainly beat violently, but it was from rage. It was not heavy, but, on the contrary, light and joyful; and there was something generously masculine in the great strokes with which it shook my breast.

Jalon was absent from Ferrière when, for the first time in more than two months, I could walk under the trees in front of the house. Rather often, moreover, he made little trips in the train and, without admitting us to his confidence with regard to his occupations, my mother and I understood that he went to Provins, to Soissons, sometimes as far as Paris. What sort of business called him to those cities? Jalon was not a man to answer questions, but he would occasionally condescend to remark, between two puffs on a cigar bought with our money:

"Fine weather in Paris!" or, "It's a fine city, Soissons!" or else, "Provins is a nasty town!"

In that way we knew where he spent his time when he was not with us.

I was, then, walking under the trees in front of the house one March morning. My mother, seeing me well

again and having nothing more to say since she had confided in me her principal troubles, ceased to be interested in me and kept trotting about the house from one room to another with a duster in her hand.

It was a beautiful day. The branches of the trees were still bare, but the grass was a brilliant green and I took long, deep breaths of the earthy odor which rose from the ground and filled the air. I had thrown a coat about my shoulders and I carried an ash cane which I remembered having seen my father use. Such a feeling of perfect health and such a zest for life welled up within me that I wanted to talk to myself and laugh aloud.

I had a curious sensation that morning: it seemed to me that I found myself all at once in possession of a great fortune. I was rich with things which were new to me, with secrets, and with an adventurous future which seemed strange and novel. It intoxicated me. When I thought of all the unknown things which I had before me, I closed my eyes as if I were under the power of too strong a wine.

An instant later I saw Odile coming toward me. Not once had she been to see me during my illness. Nevertheless, she greeted me as if we had spoken together the night before.

"Want to help me rake the avenue?" she asked. "We can each start at a different end and work toward each other. I'll give you Marcolet's rake."

I looked at her with a somber expression and did

not reply. I did not like it to think that that was all she could find to say to me.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Why don't you answer me?"

"One wouldn't say that we hadn't seen each other for two months," I replied. "Has my illness changed me?"

"Yes," she answered, posedly. "You are thinner and that's perhaps why you seem taller. You're pale. Your eyes look different."

"Ah?"

Silence followed. I gazed fixedly at Odile. If I had changed, she was still exactly as I had always known her. She was certainly pretty, very pretty. Her handsome eyes, tranquil and pensive, would have delighted anyone else but me; but on that day I felt that she formed a part of my youth, of all the years now gone forever, and that she would have no place in that future which I was picturing to myself with such pleasure and which was arousing in me so strong an emotion. It was rather strange as it was, I thought, that she should be there before me in the present, in my present. Could it be that I used to get angry because she spoke to Jalon? It was hard for me to conceive it now.

She sustained my look and said, after a moment, with that gentle obstinacy I knew so well:

"Well, are you going to help me rake the avenue?"

I gave a shrug of my shoulders.

"No, Odile, I'm not."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want to."

"Why don't you want to?"

"Let me alone. You only think of bothering me today."

"Very well," said she. "Did you know that I was going to leave Ferrière?"

"Why no, I didn't!"

"Didn't your mother tell you? She's going to send me to a convent in Soissons. The other day Mr. Jalon asked me some questions to see what progress I was making in my studies, and your mother, who was there, perceived that I didn't know anything. She said that Mademoiselle was no longer equal to her task."

"Mademoiselle" was the teacher who came to Ferrière three times a week and gave Odile and me lessons. She was one of those persons without character or personality concerning whom it is difficult to say anything except that they are human beings. Discreet and self-effacing, she heard us recite our lessons and corrected our written work. Then, after an hour and a half of explanations given in a colorless voice, she took the train back to Soissons, immediately forgotten by everyone at Ferrière, to reappear forty-eight hours later and reprove us mildly for our inattention. She was young but, as if she had been in a hurry to reach the age of sixty-five, she had already acquired all the little habits and mannerisms of an old maid. She played with the chain of her glasses, as people

never do before the age of fifty, and she had so disciplined her features that their expression never changed. Consequently, her face never had any particular expression and I have considerable difficulty today in recalling it to mind. I do not need to say that I did not like her. It humiliated me to have to obey a woman and recite lessons like a child in primary school. I was nearly sixteen years old. Didn't my mother realize it? Perhaps, however, my trials were nearing their end.

I could not repress a smile or, for that matter, this naïve question:

"Mademoiselle is leaving? Then what are they going to do with me?"

"They are going to send you to a *lycée* in Paris."

"Who said so?"

"You'll see if it is not so," said Odile. "Now I'm going to give you Marcolet's rake. You rake in one direction and I'll rake in the other. Come on."

She tried to take me by the hand, but I disengaged myself quickly. Rake, indeed! Deserting the little girl and her gardening, I ran back of the house and sat down alone on a bench in order to ponder over this piece of news, just as one goes away by oneself to examine some treasure. In the eyes of the little country boy that I was, a trip to Paris was something quite as marvelous as a world tour, and I think that, if I ever talked and sang to myself enthusiastically, it was that day and at that moment.

Passing in front of the house a moment later to

go in search of my mother, I saw Odile in the distance raking the avenue. The rake was too heavy for her and she held it so awkwardly that I should have felt a certain remorse if I had not been in so much of a hurry. Her long hair fell on each side of her face, for she was bending her head with an air of great application. That made me think of the already distant time when we used to look together at the strange designs which decorated the parlor carpet, of the time when I so admired her silence and her pensive little head with its streaming hair which swept, in the woolen landscape, those mysterious trees in which armed men were hiding.

It was, indeed, a part of my mother's plans that I should go to Paris to school, but as I was not yet entirely recovered, and, too, since there were only three months and a half left before the summer vacation, she finally decided not to send me until the next year. What a disappointment! But, in spite of the reasons which kept me at home, Odile left for Soissons a few days later.

"For a girl," said mother, "it is of no importance."

I did not understand what she meant by that; I was furious, and, out of spite, I refused either to kiss Odile or to say good-by to her.

I shall pass rapidly over the two weeks which followed. It is enough to say that mother, yielding to my entreaties, dismissed Mademoiselle and naïvely left it to me to do my work alone. Clement Jalon

came back to Ferrière the day after Odile left and life at our house took on once more its accustomed routine.

What magic there is in appearances! I speak of the accustomed routine of our life when the very foundation of it was changed forever! Was I, then, deceived by this regular observance of our daily habits? Did I not know that I brought a new point of view and a new heart to all these customary things? For a few hours, it is true, I had been absorbed by my disappointment at not being able to go to Paris, but soon I was once again just as I was before Odile announced her departure. How could I have thought of leaving Ferrière when I had my crime to commit!

Of course mother and Clement Jalon continued to live as they had in the past, to sit down at the table at the same hours; but at present it was an assassin who took his place between them, whereas they, perhaps, believed that it was only a child without malicious intent. That calmness, all the externals of our life, astonished me. I had made a terrible resolution. How was it that it did not appear in some way? Perhaps I was not yet equal to my task. Nevertheless, that man seated on my right saw my hands using my knife and fork, carrying my glass to my lips, and those same hands, so frail beside his own, were destined one day to kill him. Did he not suspect it? Was there not something which must have given him warning? Crime exists from the moment when the idea presents itself to the mind of the criminal;

and, in the eyes of an absolute judge, is there any real need that it be actually committed? One cannot hide a criminal thought from two people whom one sees at almost every hour of the day; surely it must betray itself in the end by either a word or a glance.

It seemed to me that an invisible being had slipped into the house since I conceived the plan of killing Jalon, and that, the better to escape curiosity, it had chosen to dissimulate itself within me and to appropriate my voice and my gestures. When I took my knife up to cut my meat, it was that being which made the silver handle tremble in my fingers. When I would raise my eyes suddenly to Jalon's and he would say to me: "Why, what's the matter with you?" it was that being which looked at him in my place and I did not lower my head until it had seen what it had wished to see.

I cannot say that I resisted greatly this idea of killing a man. I think even that the idea would not have taken such possession of my emotions and my mind if I had offered the least resistance. Although it had come to me almost before I was aware of it, it would have been easy for me to have repulsed it; but I did not want to, because it appealed to me and I thought it wonderful. And, for the very reason that I did not resist it, it drew nearer to me. Of the many precise and exact words which present themselves to my mind, I do not know which to choose in order to make all this perfectly understood; but that idea,

as it came closer and closer to me, seemed to increase in power and to speak in a strange language difficult to translate into human speech.

"Do you want me," it said, "to penetrate your brain and grow there like a plant, like a forest; do you want me to become the idea which will obsess you day and night, the idea for which henceforth you will breathe and live? When you awake at dawn, I shall be there. When people speak to you, I shall be between them and you. You will never be alone."

I might have defended myself; but, quite on the contrary, I should have sought out that idea if it had not come to me and, in a general acquiescence of my whole being, I formulated the joyous "yes" which delivered me up to it.

The calmness which followed deceived me concerning the importance of what had occurred. Then the departure of Odile directed my thoughts for some time into a different channel; but, as I have said, I became afterward exactly as I was before. That is not absolutely correct, however. A slow process had been taking place within me. I had, without knowing it, yielded considerable ground and, if it is true that I was, according to all appearances, the same as two or three days before, it is equally true that I was no longer master of myself.

That ordinary but terrible expression comes quite naturally to my pen to describe a case of which I know no other example. It is that way with many words and phrases which habit has put into our

mouths, which we pronounce frequently without considering their meaning or their depth. Do we not usually say, for example, that a man in anger is beside himself? But if we wanted to make our hair rise on end in terror, could we really find anything much more horrible than that figure?

The reader will believe, perhaps, that, in discovering this peculiarity which made me so different from other people, I conceived a great fear of what was going to happen to me. But it was not so; my new state of mind did not strike me with terror. Every day I gave up a little more to the singular being which had already taken possession of my body, my voice, my gestures and wished in addition my heart and brain. Had I not consented to that by my willingness to retain within me the idea of a crime?

That idea was not similar to others which the mind receives and, if it wishes, then discards; it was a living idea which fed upon me, upon my flesh, and did not leave me night or day, which breathed, spoke, and saw in the same way as an organized being like ourselves. I desired nothing more except through it. It directed the operations of my brain, regulated the sentiments of my heart, and there remained no more of my real self than what was necessary to realize it and rejoice at the perfect subjection to which I was reduced. Why, indeed, should I not have rejoiced at being so marvelously guided along that new path where all fear vanished, where all weakness was immediately succored by a vigilant strength? I had

wanted to kill my enemy ; I could no longer prevent myself from wishing to.

Before resuming the thread of this story and carrying it to the conclusion, I wish to set briefly before the reader another point which will appear still more strange than the foregoing. As the resolution to kill Clement Jalon gradually took firmer and firmer hold upon me, the hatred which I had for that man diminished in proportion, until it was gradually reduced to nothing and there remained in me only the desire to kill. Perhaps that is simpler to explain than one would at first think, for my grievances against Jalon, my rage at seeing him seated at our table, my feeling of humiliation and my impatience, all the constituent parts of the hatred I had for that man, had their source and origin in what I had been formerly, in what I felt at seeing him talk to Odile and in what my mother had told me during my convalescence. But since then, as I have said, the sickly and cowardly child I had been gradually disappeared to give way before the new man I had become, violent, assuredly, but one who did not tremble and whose only reason for delaying to kill his enemy was the desire to find the most efficacious means and the most favorable moment.

From that moment I was an assassin ; I carried crime in my heart as others carry love. My mother, when she embraced me, embraced an assassin. Jalon, when he talked to me, talked to his murderer. That is what I meant just now when I said that apparently

nothing had changed in our life but that, in reality, everything was different.

I shall cause no surprise when I say that I had frequent conversations with Clement Jalon and that I went riding with him as often as he invited me. Why not? I had nothing against him. Far from avoiding him, on the contrary, I sought his company, was interested in everything he said, and I studied his character from a hundred different angles. The fact that he was going to die and die by my hand gave him in my eyes an entirely different aspect from the one under which I had known him up to that time. If I had no particle of pity for Jalon, I had a considerable curiosity regarding him and a strange pleasure in being in his company. Sometimes, even, I was so agreeable to him that it astonished me and I saw that he, too, was surprised; and in mother's eyes I thought I guessed a sort of questioning, reproachful look. But perhaps I was mistaken, after all. Mother was so absent-minded, and I gained so clearly the impression that by telling me her troubles she had reduced them to nothing. Through a long habit of fear her face continually bore an anxious look and she had a painful way of drawing in her shoulders when Jalon raised his voice; but that no longer was the result of strong emotion. She was becoming too old to suffer very much and was gradually proceeding, as toward a refuge, to an almost complete indifference concerning what went on about her.

I have no need to say that I did no work. Mother never thought of asking me how my studies were progressing and, consequently, I had every liberty in that direction. Whole days passed during which I felt at peace with myself and enjoyed great internal calm. Also, it seemed to me that my health was improving and my strength increasing gradually and continually; and this gave me a sensation too delightful for words. When to that are added the joys of the spring season, the birds, the new foliage, and the warm sky, do not be astonished if I speak of happiness.

I read with considerable pleasure the books people generally agree in calling good—the library of my father was full of them—but today I could only with difficulty tell just what pleasure I gained thereby. Perhaps they responded in some way to that tranquillity of heart and mind of which I have just spoken; and then, too, there was in me, in spite of the criminal thoughts which I carried unceasingly in my mind, a great desire to be good and to feel that I was just. When mother asked me questions about how I had passed the day, I answered with more details than she asked, trying always to gain greater exactness, taking pleasure in rendering homage to truth in small things at a time when, on the other hand, I was descending more and more deeply into a lie. Was it because my conscience was struggling to assert itself? I leave this question for others to answer, but I know that, if a devil exists, he must

have laughed at the insignificant little victories which good thus gained over the forces of evil.

Periods of activity succeeded these periods of calmness, but it was a tranquil activity without excitement, which consisted merely in meditating on the problem which I had to solve—that is to say, the best means of making away with Jalon. At those moments I could not read, and I acted only upon the order of a sort of interior voice which never failed to counsel me. If, for example, Jalon asked me to go out riding with him, the voice said “Accept,” or, less often, “Refuse,” before he had even finished his sentence. I obeyed it joyfully.

One day it notified me that I should commit my crime that night and, for that purpose, that I should provide myself with a good knife which I should steal in the kitchen while the cook was in the garden gathering vegetables. I stole the knife and passed a part of the afternoon behind the house polishing and sharpening it. When I had made it as bright, as pointed, and as sharp as possible, I wrapped it up in two or three handkerchiefs and hid it in the drawer of the chiffonier in my room. After that I awaited the end of the day and dined as usual with my mother and Clement Jalon. I was silent, but I had an extraordinary and delightful tranquillity of mind. Mother talked little. Jalon ate noisily and told a long, uninteresting story. I could not help saying to myself:

“That man is eating and, even before he has di-

gested his meat and vegetables, life will have left his body.”

That banal and vulgar reflection was irresistibly suggested to me by the zeal with which Jalon attacked his food. Besides, I was scarcely thinking of the man himself; I was thinking of the way in which I should kill him, which is a very different thing. If I tried to stab him in the heart, I ran the risk of striking my blow either too high or too low; the best thing would be to strike at his throat and prevent him from calling for aid. Then, too, I had an implicit confidence in the inspiration of the moment. I knew that, at the second when I should raise my knife against that man, my intelligence would not fail me and that I should do my work well.

It was not until I went up to my room that I suddenly faltered in my resolution. I wondered what would become of me after I was arrested, as I should be beyond a doubt; and for a minute I was frightened and lost my presence of mind. But that did not last long. The idea soon came to me that, not being even seventeen years old, my youth would protect me from capital punishment; and, with the single exception of death, no penalty seemed proportionate to the deep and mysterious joy which my design afforded me. I then heard the voice in the silence of the night:

“You will need only to say that you did it because of the letters your uncle wrote to Mr. Pascalis. They

will be found in Jalon's pocketbook under his bolster."

"Yes," I answered in a low tone.

"You will have acted to put an end to an intolerable situation, to put an end to your mother's great distress."

"Yes," I said more loudly.

The voice stopped for an instant and resumed, imperiously:

"You will say that your mother urged you to do it."

I rose, violently moved, and cried, "Yes!" stamping my foot upon the floor.

A half-hour later I descended to the second story, where Jalon occupied the best room, and took up my position on the staircase, not far from the place where mother had listened through the door to the deep breathing of her enemy. It was probably about eleven o'clock. I knew that Jalon went to bed at ten and fell asleep almost immediately; and, in fact, the light was already out in his room. I had my knife in my hand. Instead of having to go up a few stairs, like mother on her nocturnal visit, I had to descend four or five to reach Jalon's door. Even today it is impossible for me to understand why I did not immediately go down to that door as I had been ordered to do. Was I afraid? I do not think so, and if my hand trembled, it was from impatience; but I nevertheless remained leaning against the wall, holding my

breath in order the better to hear the loud breathing of the sleeping man.

How fascinating that sound was ! I studied its slow, deep rhythm with delight, I filled my ears, my head with it, as with a rapturous music. The more I listened to it, the more the impression grew upon me that it was no longer the breathing of a man, but the respiration of the very powers of darkness. At the same time I heard the well-known sound of the voice :

“This is the moment,” it said. “Go ahead. Descend those four stairs. Open the door and rush to his bed. Go ahead. Go down.”

I did not budge. My members refused to obey me. At first I did not notice it and it was only when the voice became more pressing and I tried to move my legs that I realized my helplessness. It was just as in a dream, when we try to move a hand or an arm and cannot do so. I had the impression of being imprisoned in a body made of stone.

At that moment a strange thing happened. The voice, now whispering, now crying in my ear, which I had heard continually for weeks, suddenly ceased. I can compare the effect of that only to the sudden extinction of a light.

For some minutes I was overcome with dizziness, and then all at once fear seized me and I recovered the use of my legs. I dashed back upstairs at top speed, without caring whether I was heard or not and, once in my room, I threw myself upon the bed, trembling with terror. In one moment I had been

carried back two months and I found myself once more in the condition I was then, a prey to all my former fears and in consternation at having been on the point of committing a crime the mere thought of which now confounded me with horror.

The next day, however, I felt very calm and in the same disposition of mind as before my failure of the preceding night. As soon as I awoke I heard the voice:

"You imbecile," it said, "why didn't you kill that man last night? The moment was promising." And it added in the most scornful tone, "You were afraid."

"I shouldn't have been," I thought, "if you had continued to talk to me."

There was a pause. The reply did not come at once.

"You must get accustomed to depending upon yourself alone," said the voice, finally.

I rose and dressed myself.

"You will try again tonight," resumed the voice. "Today you will carry the knife in your pocket."

My knife! What had I done with it? In my confusion I had lost it.

"It is in the drawer," said the voice.

I pulled open the drawer. It was true; the knife was there, carefully wrapped in two handkerchiefs. I must have put it away automatically without realizing it.

A little later I was going down to breakfast when I met my mother on the stairs. She had two sheets

and a pillow-case in her hands and seemed in a great hurry.

"Good morning, mamma!"

"Oh! It is you," she said, exactly as if I had abruptly wakened her from sleep. "My poor child, I should have passed you by without greeting you. You don't know what has happened. We got a telegram this morning from the Sisters of the Redemption. Odile has fallen ill. Jalon left for Soissons a half-hour ago. He is going to bring her home with him."

"What's the trouble with her?"

"I've no idea. She looked so healthy. She was a good little girl. Let me pass. I must go and make ready her room."

And she disappeared with her little rapid, excited step. I ate breakfast alone and then I went and walked under the trees.

It was a beautiful day in the first week in June, but, although only nine o'clock, it already promised to be too hot. At times a breeze sprang up which set the tall grass in motion; and then the meadow which stretched out before me seemed to breathe in almost voluptuously the air, laden with the perfume of leaves and fresh earth, which passed over it.

I was not happy that morning. I went and hid myself in the big fir tree where we used to play, Odile and I, when we were children. Now what a solitude there was beneath those branches! Perhaps at that very moment Jalon was talking to Odile, and it angered me. I had not had that feeling for long weeks,

but the night before I kept relapsing occasionally into my former sadness. It came in fits. Sometimes I reacted; more often I resigned myself to that weakness, just as a person, after struggling a little, abandons himself to sleep.

A moment later I went into the meadow and stretched myself out on the ground. The grass was high and hid me entirely. The sun had not yet heated it to its roots and close to the ground it kept all the coolness of the nocturnal dew. I felt as though I were plunging into a bath. Very far away, over by the birch trees, the farmhand, on his reaping machine, was going from one end of the meadow to the other, and he was singing. A good hour passed in that way. Without knowing why, I felt happier, more light at heart. When I closed my eyes, I had the strange impression that the earth was rocking me, bearing me at random here and there, to the right and to the left, and up toward the heavens. I no longer weighed anything. I heard the song come and go from one end of the meadow to the other like some mysterious being moving through the air.

However, each time that the reaper disappeared in the hollow where the stone trough is, and when, consequently, I no longer heard his song, a vague anxiety seized me. I felt alone, too much alone. Something passed by quite close to me, like an invisible bird flying a few yards from my face. And then that strange sound rose in the midst of the silence, that sound which resembled no other to be

heard on earth, concerning which I could not have said whether it resounded within my head or in the meadow, far away or very near to me. It rose, rose like a voice. Assuredly it was *my* voice. It had been silent for nearly an hour this morning; under the fir tree I had not heard it, and the strange emptiness which resulted had troubled me. But now it rose anew, yet how changed! It did not speak; one would have said that it sang, that it took up the reaper's refrain, but on a higher, more even tone. And suddenly it began to vibrate and then to rise with a terrifying rapidity. All at once I heard a great cry in my ears, in my brain, and almost at the same time I heard the voice of the reaper who was returning up the slope.

Five or six times I heard that cry. It betrayed each time a greater despair, an immense, almost superhuman despair; there was something about it which resembled the sounds a deaf mute makes when he tries to pronounce a word. I did not move. It seemed, during the absence of the reaper, as if I were nailed to the ground. The blood throbbed in the arteries of my throat. I was afraid of that threatening wrath which I felt hovering everywhere about me like a great bird in flight.

When the reaper passed near enough to hear me, I called out to him. We exchanged a few words and, without waiting for him to disappear again in the hollow, I fled.

I ran first to the house and sat down in my room

to reflect. My mother, passing before my open door, was so struck by my pensive air that she came in and asked me why I was so melancholy. She might have thought that it was because of Odile's illness if that had still been in her mind, but the telegram received three hours before seemed already forgotten. A thousand little things required her attention and, for the moment, nothing counted any more to the elderly, absent-minded woman except her clean linen, the examination of which she had before her.

Something had followed me into the house, a murmur which resembled the buzzing of a swarm of insects about my head; and, after a few minutes, I went outdoors again. I walked for a while beneath the trees. Then I took refuge again under the fir tree on the edge of the lawn, because there I believed that the voice would not reach me; and, in fact, I heard nothing at the foot of that tree. Through its branches I looked out over the meadow all white with light. It was no longer breathing, now that the reaper had cut the high grass with its multiple eddies. It was just as if, singing joyfully in his nasal voice, he had murdered it.

A long quarter of an hour passed. Why I suddenly attached so much importance to the return of Odile I could not have said; but the fact remains that I felt so nervous, so exhausted, that I could not remain standing and I had to sit down. Now that I was beneath that tree, I thought, I must not leave it; for I felt that if I left its shade something evil

might befall me. Through its black branches I saw the meadow from which the reaper had now departed. It had a sinister appearance, left, as it were, to itself and delivered up to that wrath which hovered above it like a great bird of ill omen. How dangerous it would be, I thought, to venture there! The heat was becoming more intense and the sky seemed to be gradually approaching the earth.

When finally I saw Jalon's automobile arrive beneath the plane trees, I rose with a bound. Perhaps Odile would turn her head in my direction. I wanted her to see me, or at least to guess that I was hidden in the tree; but I had the disappointment of seeing her, helped out of the car by Jalon, go straight toward the house without turning her head either to the right or to the left.

Odile did not appear at lunch that day, but I learned from mother's conversation with Jalon that she appeared less ill than the telegram had caused them to fear. The night before she had fainted and the Sisters of the Redemption did not want to keep her, because, they said, the convent was not a hospital and she would be much better cared for at home.

"It's because they were afraid something might happen to her and that it would frighten the other pupils," said mother, not without a trace of anger. "If only the poor little thing does not die!"

At that Jalon pulled a financial paper out of his

pocket and began to read it while waiting for his coffee.

"What makes you say that, mamma?" I asked. "If she looks better . . ."

Mother made an evasive gesture. "I don't say that she doesn't," she replied. "But I have the idea that when Odile dies it will be without any apparent reason."

"But why?" I insisted.

"You ask me that, my child, as if you thought I could answer it. I mean precisely what I said: she will die without anyone's being able to say why. As far as that goes, I have never been able to understand the child."

"True," said Jalon, lowering his paper. And he bent his head forward in order to look at mother over his eyeglasses. "She is a total stranger to you."

"And to you?" I asked savagely.

"To me?" he said, turning his head in my direction. "Who mentioned me?"

I made no reply.

He looked at me for a moment. Then, shrugging his shoulders, he folded up his paper and put it back in his pocket. Then he rose and took a few steps in front of my mother and myself, apparently plunged in thought.

After the maid had brought in the coffee and left the dining-room again, Jalon came back to the table and stood leaning up against it. Facing us, his back to the fireplace and his hands resting on the table-

cloth, he looked at us as if he were on the point of saying something. Mother and I raised our eyes to his, but without opening our mouths, for his manner was so solemn that it imposed silence.

After a moment he took off his glasses and, without ceasing to gaze at us, put his hand to his coat. We saw him feel in one of his inside pockets and take out his pocketbook. Mother blushed crimson. He smiled, took two letters between his thumb and forefinger from one of the compartments of the pocketbook and held them up as high as his head as if to call our attention to them.

From a gesture mother made, I realized that she was trying to speak, but Jalon shook his head as if to say that it was useless and, putting his pocketbook back into his coat, he went toward the fireplace.

There, with an almost religious gravity, he took a match from the box hanging on the wall, scratched it on the hearthstones, and lighted first one letter and then the other; and he held them out over the hearth between the same two fingers.

They burned slowly, with a straight little flame running along the edge of the paper and a black smoke which mounted without a tremor in the still air of the room. When they were almost consumed, he let them fall upon the hearth and returned to us. Then, leaning over the table, he whispered, looking first at mother and then at me:

“I beg you to believe that, if I have done that, it was not for your sake”—he pointed up to the ceil-

ing—"but for hers. She asked me to do it when we were coming back from Soissons."

"She asked you?" exclaimed mother, in amazement. "How did she know anything about it?"

"I didn't tell her!" I blurted out.

Jalon shrugged his shoulders and threw me a glance.

"No, you didn't," he answered in a low voice. "No one did. She knew a number of things in that way. It did no good to try to keep them from her. She guessed them all."

I refused to hear any more. I jumped up from the table and fled.

It was so hot in the afternoon that I remained in my room to take a nap. The heaviness of the atmosphere, threatening a storm, had given me a headache. Not having my coat on, I had put my knife in the pocket of my trousers; but now I took it out, for fear of cutting myself upon it in my sleep, and put it away in a drawer of my chiffonier. Then I lay down on the bed. Long minutes passed without my being able to lose consciousness. I turned first on one side then on the other, furious at feeling that there was something in me, in my head, which refused to become drowsy. Outside, the wind had ceased and not even the call of a single bird came to trouble the deep, lugubrious silence which extended over everything.

I tried to read, but how could I understand what

I had before my eyes when one sentence, always the same, passed continually through my brain:

“Now he is sleeping in his room. The moment is sure. You must take advantage of it.”

I soon laid aside my book and, getting up, began to walk back and forth in the room. At the same instant a great anguish seized me. I no longer felt brave and calm as I had the week before, and I remember that several times, involuntarily, I gave a groan and struck my breast.

At last I left my room and went down to the parlor. There I remained for some time, idly sitting in an armchair, my arms on the table before me, looking down at the great complicated designs in the carpet which had so intrigued me in my youth. Without being entirely calm, I was less tormented in that room by the voice which had talked to me incessantly all the time that I was lying on my bed. Here one would have said that something prevented its reaching me. I heard the clock strike four and—I don’t know how—I fell asleep.

When I awoke the voice was close at my side, in my ear. It cried:

“Tonight, at eleven o’clock! Tonight, at eleven o’clock!”

I got up abruptly and went out of the room. In the hall it cried to me: “You have forgotten your knife. Go and get it.”

It dashed along beside me. I mounted the staircase like a madman, and it was then that I met Odile.

She had not heard me coming, because I had on sandals, and she was startled when she saw me suddenly beside her. Her face was so white that it frightened me; I did not expect her to look that way. She leaned against the wall.

"Is it you, John?" she said, finally. "Why did you frighten me so?"

I remembered what Jalon had said about her that very morning and I was reluctant to remain any longer in her presence.

"It is I," I said, rather rudely.

My voice was hoarse and I spoke rather in spite of myself than because I wanted to.

"Let me go," I added. "I must go upstairs."

"Yes," she said, gently, "you must go upstairs. Tomorrow you will come to see me in my room."

I passed her without answering.

When I reached my door I had to stop a moment, my heart was beating so hard on account of the speed with which I had mounted. The room was plunged in darkness. I had the strange impression that there was some one in front of the chiffonier, closing one of the drawers, but I did not have time to be afraid; with a sudden rush which I could not restrain I threw myself upon that drawer. I found my knife in it as I had left it.

As the evening advanced my anxiety increased and I did not know what to do to pass the two hours which remained before it was time for me to go down

to Jalon's room. Odile had not dined with us. I had gone to my room immediately, and there I was waiting in my agitation. Mother went to bed, then Jalon, and a short time after the whole house was plunged into that silence in which the countryside seems to bury itself every evening as in a tomb. I stretched out on my bed, not to sleep, but rather in the hope that I should become more calm with physical inaction; but I soon realized that all rest was forbidden to me.

By that time my anxiety had become intense. I was resolved to commit my crime. It seemed to me that I had never been so near to accomplishing my design, not even at the moment when I had been at Jalon's very door. Something, however, was now lacking—the joy which the thought of the murder had previously afforded me. I knew that I was now engaged on a path which I could not leave; but, just as I was nearing the end of it, I felt myself overwhelmed by a deep and terrible melancholy, whereas I had started out upon it with feverish zeal, the mere remembrance of which now filled me with amazement.

I rose and walked about a little. I had placed my watch on the table and I consulted it from time to time.

“In an hour,” I thought, “in three-quarters of an hour, I am going to kill that man,” much in the same way that one would say: “In an hour, in three-quarters of an hour, I am going to die.”

My hand continually clutched the knife which I had once more put back in my pocket; the handle was clammy with my perspiration. Within me I no longer heard the voice speaking and I realized that everything which had thus far sustained me had now abandoned me. For how long? It was so hot that I should have liked to undress completely and lie down naked on my bed; but what good would it do? Did I not have to go downstairs in a moment?

"When I return," I said to myself, "I will rest."

When should I return? I do not know why, that idea made me shudder.

I leaned out of the window, resting my elbows on the window bar. The atmosphere was not so heavy and it seemed as if the sky were clearing. At that moment I had the impression that something was happening, no longer within me, but about me. Moved by a childish fear, I went and made sure that my door was really locked; but it was not a human hand which I had to fear, and I knew it perfectly.

I heard the dining-room clock strike half past ten, then quarter to eleven. Instead of feeling more agitated, my heart, I thought, beat more slowly, more weakly, too. After a few minutes I unlocked the door; and then, as I put my hand on the knob to open it, I heard a loud cry.

I let go and backed away from the door. I recall that I seized the furniture on the way, the chairs and the table, as if I were vainly trying to hold my-

self back. When I reached my bed I dropped upon it and immediately lost consciousness.

The next day was still hotter than the preceding. Already at seven o'clock mother, always the first to rise, had closed the window shutters in the hope that a little coolness might remain in the house. The threatening storm which did not break affected her and several times that morning she had to lie down.

I went out for a moment, but returned almost immediately. In the dull sky, my eyes sought the sun in vain and the shadows at my feet were livid as if the earth there had been wounded. Not a sound came from the fields and the trees. The meadow lay stretched out before me, struck with death since the mowing of its tall, undulating grass.

I passed the whole morning in my room, sitting beside the window. Occasionally I looked out between the shutters at the plane trees with their broad, motionless leaves; but it made my heart grow heavy. A flood of memories would come rushing back to me and I was overwhelmed with melancholy. For an hour I could not find the strength to rise. There was in my brain, I might say in my whole being, something which corresponded to the gloom and the tragic silence of the out-of-doors. My hand clutched my knife as tightly as if it were a relic or a fetish from which I expected happiness. Happiness! Never had I felt so wretched, so abandoned. Not a thought occupied

my mind; the voice was silent. I felt as if I were in a desert where my soul would die of thirst.

For nothing in the world would I have questioned anyone concerning the cry which I had heard the night before, and at every moment I was afraid that some one was about to mention it.

"It did not sound like a human voice," I said to myself. "Perhaps I imagined it. The blood was beating violently in my ears at the moment when I fainted."

Several times, in spite of myself, I heard the sound of the opening and closing of a door and I knew what room it was. I did not want to think about it, but, nevertheless, I listened intently and I interpreted each and every sound as it occurred. I recognized mother's step and I guessed fear in the rapidity with which she ran up and down stairs and went in and out of that room. I could also hear Jalon walking back and forth on the floor below, he who ordinarily did not leave his armchair. Why did they not keep quiet!

After three-quarters of an hour the noises ceased and it was not far from half past eleven when I heard the voice, no longer as usual within me, whisper in my ear. I gave a start and tried to speak, but it imposed silence.

"Don't make a sound," it said. "Your mother is lying down in the parlor. Jalon is asleep in his room. This is the best possible moment. You have not much time left."

"And she?" I asked aloud, thinking of Odile.

"She?" repeated the voice in so furious a tone that it caused a cold shudder to pass over me. "She is asleep, do you hear? *She is asleep*. Rise and obey!"

It ceased, and from that moment on I never heard it again. However, I got up. The handle of my knife felt moist and I wanted to take it in the other hand, but I could not; it was as if stuck to my fingers.

It was as dark as at nightfall. For some minutes the wind had been blowing with a dull roar which frightened me. I opened the door with my left hand, gently, and stepped out into the hall. Was it because it was so dark? I had the impression all at once that I was in a strange place. The blood beat in my ears with a bell-like rhythm. Its throbbings crazed me. I saw the door of Odile's room before me at the end of the long hall and, instead of going downstairs, it was in that direction that I moved.

I cannot recall how I reached it. I remember only that I became more and more apprehensive at the sound of the wind, and an instant later I found myself in Odile's chamber beside her bed.

She was lying on her back and her hair shone in the partial darkness about the white face on the pillow. I thought that she was asleep when I first saw her, but she spoke to me at once without opening her eyes.

"Is that you, John?" she asked in so low a voice that I could scarcely hear her. "Have you still that knife in your hand? Put it down."

I cannot describe the effect which those words produced in me. Her voice instantly brought me back to myself. I let go the knife and it fell clattering to my feet. An immense despair came over me. I tried to speak, but could say nothing.

"Afterward you must not be so sad," she continued. "You will remember that everything is blotted out and that I told you so."

She was silent for a moment as if in thought. Then she opened her eyes and spoke in a somewhat different tone:

"Just now I want you to help me. I want to sit up. Put the pillow behind my back."

I arranged her as best I could, but I was so awkward about it and I was trembling so that I must have hurt her, for once or twice she gave a little moan. When she was sitting up, she said:

"Open the shutters."

I knelt beside her. "Why do you want me to open the shutters, Odile? It will make the room too hot." And suddenly I burst out sobbing.

"Open the shutters," she repeated. "They must be opened now."

She put such a tone of authority into that command that I could not but obey. Going to the window, I threw back the shutters. The wind was blowing harder and the trees bent low, first to one side, then to the other.

"John, do you see the fir tree?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Is it still or is it moving?"

"It's bending over, first one way and then the other, Odile."

I heard her repeat, "First one way and then the other," and I realized that she was in a delirium.

"Draw my bed up to the window so that I can see it, John," she then commanded me.

I obeyed at once, but such a feeling of anxiety came over me that I could not prevent myself from asking:

"Odile, you are not going to die, are you?"

She made no reply but, as soon as she was in front of the window, she opened her eyes again and said more distinctly:

"It is true that it is bending over, John. Look at it carefully. What do you see?"

I sat down beside her.

"I see the tree, Odile, the fir tree . . ."

"Yes," she said, "but in the fir tree. . . . Oh, John, don't you see? There's a man in the fir tree, a tall, black man. . . ."

She panted a little and resumed:

"His feet are in the fork, near the bottom, where the big branches start. His head projects above the top. It is he."

I thought that she was frightened and I said, to reassure her:

"There is no one in that tree, Odile. It is the wind which makes it bend that way."

But she insisted: "I tell you that he is there, with

his bow and his long arrows." Then she said, in a voice which was barely audible: "Stand aside, John. I am the one he is looking at."

She gave a cry and fell forward. A stream of blood spurted from her lips and spread slowly over her breast.

A few hours later I was in a room on the second floor. Before me a man, crazed with grief, was continually putting his hands up to his face to choke back his cries. It was Clement Jalon. He walked painfully, as if his feet were dragging chains, back and forth from the door to the window. From time to time he turned in my direction a pallid face, streaked with tears and perspiration.

"So," he repeated in a choking voice, "it is all over?"

I nodded.

"What did she say?"

"She said," I began again for the tenth time—"she said that she saw some one in the big tree."

"Ah?" said Jalon, as if he were stunned. He stopped in the middle of the room, gave a nervous shake of his head, and resumed his walking. After a few minutes he let himself fall into an armchair and seemed a bit more calm. His unbuttoned shirt revealed his powerful throat and chest. His breathing was loud and difficult.

"I knew, nevertheless, that she was going to die," he said at last. "She told me so herself. The lovely

little girl!" He hid his face in his hands. "And she gave you no message for me?" he asked. "Nothing?"

"No."

"She told you that she saw some one in the tree? It was delirium that made her say that. She had delirium in Soissons, too, when I first arrived. She said when she saw me: 'Oh, Mr. Jalon, it's you! I was afraid that he was going to harm you.'"

Those words drew me from the stupor into which I was plunged. I gave a start.

"She said that several times," resumed Jalon, "Perhaps she was thinking of the man she thought she saw in the tree. Poor little thing!"

"Yes," I said, leaning toward him. "What else did she say?"

"She said," continued Jalon, more slowly—"she said, 'I prevented him from entering your room last night.'"

I wrung my hands in anguish.

"She also used to say sometimes," he continued: "Watch out, Mr. Jalon. Be sure to lock your door. He has drawn Death to Ferrière and he will not depart empty-handed.' Poor little thing! Can one imagine her saying things like that?"

He began to groan again. I rose and took a few steps. My throat was parched.

"Didn't she say anything else?" I asked.

"She told me that she had asked to be chosen in my place, but that a knife was not necessary to kill

her and that God would cause her death whenever he wished with a bow and arrows."

I gave a cry.

"What is it?" asked Jalon.

"You terrify me," I gasped.

And I fell to the floor as a dead body falls.

It rained hard that afternoon and the following days. In the rough road which led from the church to the cemetery I walked between mother and Jalon without knowing where I found the strength to put one foot before the other.

I could not watch the men as they lowered the casket into the ground, and when, following mother and Jalon, I approached the edge of the grave in my turn to sprinkle my handful of earth upon the casket, the grave seemed so deep that for a moment I was seized with dizziness and closed my eyes. Then I had to make an effort to depart, for the great copper crucifix on the top of the casket absorbed my whole attention and it seemed to me that I could never take my eyes from that God who extends his arms to us from the depths of Christian tombs.

*THE PILGRIM ON THE
EARTH*



THE PILGRIM ON THE EARTH

A FEW years ago, in the course of a little piece of literary research he was pursuing in a town in Virginia, the writer chanced to come upon some papers and documents of a very curious character, so curious, in fact, that he was sufficiently interested to copy them in their entirety. However, since they have reference to things already far in the past and almost forgotten even in the district where they occurred, it is best not to present them to the reader without first going back to the beginning and recalling an event which caused considerable excitement in 1895 in the university town of Fairfax.

About the 10th of September of that year there was found in the river the body of a young man of seventeen or eighteen years of age. The number of contusions and broken bones showed clearly that he must have fallen and then rolled to the bottom of a steep slope, striking against jagged rocks along the way.

Just before the river reaches the town it flows between two high and very rocky banks which increase in height as one proceeds up the river into the open country. It was not, then, difficult to reconstruct the accident. The young man was walking, undoubtedly at night, in the outskirts of the city. Without seeing where he was going, he came to the

banks of the river, hidden from him by the darkness. The ground was soggy from a recent shower. He slipped suddenly and, before he was able to help himself, was dashed upon the rocks and fell into the river, where he was drowned.

However, the night of his death was so clear and bright that several people refused to believe that he could have reached the edge of the river without seeing it at his feet and, supposing that, for one reason or another, he had criminally taken his own life, they proposed that he be buried in a special part of the cemetery without the usual ceremonies. This argument was so plausible and they were so energetic in its defense that the town was almost on the point of accepting their point of view and of burying the young man as they desired.

The inquest established that his name was Daniel O'Donovan and that he had been for some days in the town, intending to study at the university. During the course of the inquest, however, papers were discovered written in the hand of the deceased which suggested that people had come too rapidly to conclusions and that there were very peculiar circumstances of which, for the reason that they had not been known, no account had been taken; circumstances which must lead to a conclusion entirely different from that which they had been on the point of adopting. The burial was, therefore, postponed to the next day. The manuscripts were carefully examined and the testimony of the persons who had

known Daniel O'Donovan was heard. In the end, since doubt still remained, they decided that it was best to err on the side of charity rather than on that of severity. So they wrote in the register opposite the name of Daniel O'Donovan the words of an old formula very convenient in such cases: *dead by the visitation of God*; and they decided to bury the young man decently, giving orders for this verse from the Book of Psalms to be carved on his tombstone:

How shall a young man cleanse his way?

Almost at the same time the editor of a newspaper in the town took it upon himself to publish the manuscript which had been found, using for the title the verse which had been chosen for the epitaph. This publication aroused much interest and speculation and, since the manuscript stops quite suddenly at a critical moment, there were some people who, aided by what they knew about the character of the young man, tried to complete the narrative which it contained. There is, then, a sequel to the manuscript; but it has the interest only of fiction and I have thought it best to ignore it. I have replaced it by certain letters which seemed more interesting to me both because the facts they bring out are true and also because they fill in serious lacunæ in the manuscript. As far as Daniel O'Donovan's story is concerned, I have naturally not wished to abbreviate its lengthy passages or to correct its numerous awk-

wardnesses. I may also say that, in the story as well as in the letters, as might be expected, I have replaced the real names by fictitious ones.

The documents follow:

I

MS. OF DANIEL O'DONOVAN

FAIRFAX, *Sept. 6, 1895.*

I do not write this in view of a reader. I am telling the story of my childhood for myself alone and I shall destroy the manuscript when I have completed it. I have come to a difficult pass and it seems best for me, in order to decide clearly what I should do, to write down many things of which I have not thought until today.

I was eleven years old when I lost, almost at the same time, my father and my mother. In the wills I was commended to the care of my uncle. He took me in against his personal wishes and gave me the most uncomfortable room in the house. It was too large to be heated easily in winter and in summer it was stifling. In addition it was in the attic, the middle room of three, one of which was haunted and, for that reason, used only as a storeroom. The other was occupied by my uncle's father-in-law, a surly old man. He had been a soldier of the Confederacy and he said continually that it was a piece of good fortune and an honor for my uncle to live under the

same roof with a former captain in the army of Stonewall Jackson. My uncle, on the other hand, thought that the Captain should congratulate himself on having a place at the table of an honest man and a bed where he could end his days in peace. The result was that the two men did not speak to each other.

I used to go to bed at nine o'clock, but I never fell asleep immediately. I stayed awake until about ten o'clock to hear all the familiar noises, the voices and the sound of doors closing one after the other. Before that, all through the summer, I heard the Captain when he returned from his evening walk and disturbed my uncle and aunt who were sitting on the porch. This porch was too small; two arm-chairs effectively blocked the passage to the door. I could imagine my aunt rising and moving her chair back respectfully and eagerly, for she worshiped her father. Then the Captain would say, "Good evening, daughter." After that a peculiar squeaking noise told me that he was passing close to my uncle and forcing him to push his chair back a little on the stone floor. Not a word was exchanged between the Captain and his son-in-law.

The Captain then entered the house and went to the pantry, where he opened the cupboards, cut some bread, and then there would be a clinking sound as he took a glass from the row on the shelf. In a few minutes he would come to the staircase and, after hitting his foot against the first step, the existence

of which seemed always to surprise him, he began to come upstairs. This frightened me. He had a heavy, measured tread which echoed through the house. As long as he was below the second floor I dared to listen; I even amused myself by imagining that he had the grimacing face of an apparition. However terrible he might be, there was still a whole story between us and I took a sort of delight in my apprehension; but as soon as I heard him come to the landing and hit against the first step of the staircase leading to my floor, I convulsively pulled the bed-clothes over my head. I always had the idea that it might not be the Captain but another person coming with the express purpose of cutting my throat. In my excitement I pressed my lips to the little metal crucifix which my aunt had me wear about my neck; and at that moment I fell asleep.

In the morning the Captain would enter my room brusquely and cry, "Get up!" He was a tall old man with extremely broad shoulders. Long white hair fell in curls on each side of his austere countenance, and his blue eyes gazed at the world with a look of scorn. An old wound in the throat had affected his powers of speech, so he said almost nothing. Before shouting, "Get up!" he always made an involuntary movement of his jaws as if he wanted to bite the word he could not articulate; but I never thought of laughing at it.

His manner frightened me a bit. He kept in the daytime something of the fantastic aspect I imagined

him to have at night, for my brain deformed at pleasure his somewhat severe expression and I saw cruelty where there was surely only a remainder of professional brutality. I often heard him walking in his room with that same heavy tread which I feared so much after dark. When the weather was warm, he sat in a wicker chair near the window and fanned himself gently with a newspaper, making exclamations from time to time, the energy of which drew him from the revery in which he was buried. Then he would rise and cough in so unnatural a manner that it made me smile in spite of my anxiety. He knew that I could hear and it irritated him. One day he came to the door of my room and cried, "Daniel!" I was seized with fright. I did not answer, but rose, moving my chair back. "Get out!" he cried. I fled. That scene was reproduced so often that I ended by abandoning my room during the day and by going elsewhere to read.

The view from my room was cut off by the Presbyterian church which only a yard and an alleyway separated from our house. It seemed still closer when I saw it from my bed, because then it filled the whole window. It was built in imitation of a certain church in London. Below the slate roof I could easily make out the high Gothic windows, their white shutters which in the winter were half open, and the base of the steeple with two Corinthian columns at each corner. The church made me sad and its black stonework had a sinister appearance. I had been told that

it was once partly destroyed by a fire, in the course of which the steeple, weakened by the flames, had finally fallen smoldering upon the roof of a neighboring house and that this house, set on fire in its turn, had been entirely consumed in a few hours. We lived in the one built on the site, so I never looked at the new steeple without fear. If it too fell it would come right across my room.

The last day of the year, exactly at midnight, an extraordinary commotion would wake me with a start. I heard the loud singing of hymns dominated by the deep rumbling of the bells. Then I could see the church in flames. A radiant light enveloped it like a halo and made it look all white and fantastic. I trembled for fear it would catch fire all of a sudden and, in the horrible dread I had of dying a violent death, I would throw myself on my knees near the door and pray with fervor for my life to be spared.

Since I have mentioned the door I will add, with no ironical intent, that it was the one part of my chamber that I liked the best, and that for two reasons. First, because it was divided—on account of the desire of my aunt, who, brought up in Providence, had kept some of the superstitions of that part of the country—into four panels of unequal size arranged so that the spaces between reproduced the form of a Latin cross; second, because it was surmounted by a motto in Gothic letters decorated with ornamental briars which said something like this:

"Remember that there is some one in this room ever watching you and silently listening to you." I found a strange comfort in these mysterious words.

My room seemed immense to me. It was made still larger by the monastic simplicity of the furniture. There was a camp bed with a gray coverlet, a faded rug, a round table on which my aunt had put a big Catholic Bible; then, near the window, a bureau surmounted by an oval mirror. That was all. The varnished floor looked like marble; the walls were whitewashed. There was no fireplace, but sometimes, about Christmas-time, an oil stove was brought in, the odor of which made me ill.

My uncle never interested himself in me. Wrapped up in his own egoism, he lived in a sort of perpetual adoration of himself and spent his time in what he called his library. This was a small room agreeably situated at one end of the ground floor. Solid masses of oleanders protected it from the sun. Piles of logs burned incessantly in cold weather. On occasion I was invited into that delightful room. I remember that my feet touched a rich, dark carpet very different from the ragged rug in my room. To the right and the left of the open-fire stove there were bookcases almost to the ceiling, with rows of ancient books offering their polished bindings to my admiration. In the middle of the room stood a big, round mahogany table with a globe lamp and an open *es-critoire*, both of which were reflected on its polished surface.

In this so suitable a setting I can see a little man seated in a great upholstered armchair, his face raised toward me but his eyes upon his books—my uncle. In his thin face, worn by age, I can discover no trace of a generous mind, nothing of a charitable heart; everything betrays distrust, boredom, and the bitterness of a solitary person who hates his solitude. His eyes never remain on one thing long. His thin lips are always half open, as if to utter something which they will not if I look at him, for he is incredibly shy. He often puts his hands upon his cheeks as if to hide the long parallel wrinkles. His hair is a little gray, but his eyebrows still remain black and bushy. He dresses carefully and in the fashion of his youth.

He used to talk to me in high-sounding phrases, the sense of which I did not always understand, although he spoke in a slow and pompous manner. After a lengthy speech, most of which escaped me, he would lay the palm of his hand upon my head and say:

“Perhaps you have something there which will repay us for the trouble we have taken to bring you up according to good principles.”

A few minutes later he would dismiss me, interrupting himself in the midst of a complicated sentence as if it were too much effort to complete it. I never knew why he asked me into his study; I knew no more when I left. I imagined that he tired sometimes of his books and the papers that he piled upon

the round table, and that it rested him, after his hard work, to lecture me. I was mistaken only with respect to the work. My uncle, in fact, made it a curious point of honor almost never to leave his library; but he was horribly bored there and did not work at all, if one means by work a really continuous effort. He walked back and forth smoking cigars, or else he sat in the upholstered armchair, his legs crossed, with a book in his hand, and his eyes wandering over its pages. I could see him thus from the garden by hiding myself behind the oleanders which grew in front of the window. Then again, he would sometimes scribble notes on small pieces of paper and throw them in a pile on the table or drop them absent-mindedly on the floor beside his chair.

I learned this last detail from my aunt one day when I went to her room to see her. I used to go often and I think she liked my visits. For my part, I enjoyed being with her in spite of the fact that I had no real affection for her. I was always sure to find her knitting beside the window, a big, round basket filled with gray and white wools beside her chair. As soon as I appeared she would begin to talk. She would ask me what I had been doing and, without waiting for an answer, would start off on an interminable monologue. When she lost her breath she made an effort to continue in whispers. She was short and always put a stool under her feet when she was sitting down. The tiny, light-gray eyes in her fat, red face expressed nothing beyond an avid curi-

osity. Sometimes, with a rapid gesture, she wiped her lips with the back of her hand and looked about her quickly as if to make sure that no one had seen her. Often she put one of her needles in her hair, which she wore gathered in a pug on top of her head. The tight bows of her silver spectacles cut her soft cheeks; they hurt and she was continually promising herself aloud to take the glasses to the optician. When she took them off I lowered my eyes with an inexplicable sort of modest shame. She was always dressed in stiff, dark clothes. The tight bodice seemed to make her breathing difficult and the dress spread out around the waist in a myriad of little pleats that shimmered in the light.

I listened without impatience to her garrulous voice as it poured into my ears all sorts of confidences. My aunt certainly forgot that I was not twelve years old and that most of what she said was practically unintelligible to me. Perhaps she did not expect me to understand, but merely to listen; and I was a good listener. The indifference of her husband and the sullenness of her father condemned her to a solitude which made her suffer but which, as she said herself, bowing her head and lowering her eyes, she offered to her Creator as the greatest mortification of her life. I doubt, however, if she realized just why that solitude was so hard for her to bear; the fact is that she suffered from not being able to talk as much as she desired.

She talked about everything, with no order or

sense of measure. Words suggested ideas to her, and her conversation was so disconnected that I never knew just where we were at any given moment, even when she told me stories I could understand, stories which interested me; but I got sometimes little details which were delightful. Often she would tell me Irish legends, some of which struck my imagination by their strangeness. They were a combination of the supernatural and the pious and I was never tired of hearing them; but they filled me with fear and gave me bad dreams. One of them seemed more curious and terrifying than the others. It was the story of Frank McKenna.

Frank McKenna was determined to go hunting the hare one Sunday morning. His father forbade him and, when he persisted, laid an awful curse upon him: "Heaven grant that you never return alive if you go hunting on the Lord's Day!" But Frank paid no attention to him and went away with his companions. My aunt explained to me that he was *fey*, that is to say, that he was driven to his death by something irresistible.

They found a big black hare that they pursued all day without being able to catch up with it, for this hare was surely of Satanic origin; and toward evening the young men abandoned the chase and returned home, with the exception of Frank McKenna, who disappeared in the mountains, still trailing the animal. I was always in hopes that Frank McKenna would be saved in the end, but each time he died the

same mysterious death and was always found lying on the ground in the mountains in the center of a circle he had traced with his stick. And my aunt would add that he had his hat pulled down over his eyes and his prayer-book open over his mouth. They brought him back home on a litter. And thus the curse of his father had been heard.

My aunt also talked much to me about the Old and the New Testaments which she had read and reread many times. She had a marked predilection for the terrible passages in the Scriptures; for example, she chose in the Old Testament the story of the children who were devoured by a bear for having mocked Elisha and, in the New, the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

She read the newspapers a great deal and, without any consideration for my extreme youth, she talked about all the European governments and gave me her opinions concerning each one of them. I admired then her ability to pronounce so many words that made no sense in my mind. Sometimes she spoke about the United States, but rather rarely; and I noticed that she never said anything about the Civil War. One day, by exception, she told me that, a few months after the end of the war, when the best families in the town were ruined, the ladies began to make cakes in their kitchens and sell them through the windows to the passers-by; but ordinarily she kept silent about that whole period concerning which everyone in the neighborhood talked so much. I did

not dare to ask her the reason for this silence, but it surprised me, and I recall that I tried to explain it to myself in a thousand different ways. Later I understood, or thought I did.

The most important part of what my aunt told me, however, was concerning the imperfections of my uncle and the extreme patience which she had to show to live with him in a Christian way. Unfortunately I no longer recall distinctly what she said about his character, for at that age I remembered nothing abstract and only concrete facts remained fixed in my memory.

She enjoyed being minutely precise and she took care to give a rigorously truthful portrait of her husband; but she knew nothing of the art of exposition and she mingled inextricably the most incongruous details. She liked to say that my uncle had changed a great deal since his marriage, and her portrait of him at the age of twenty-five served as a background for a severe description of the present reality. He was no longer anything except the caricature of himself, and she had never seen anyone become so physically ugly in the space of scarcely twelve years. She detested everything that made him himself: his yellowish face, his trembling hands, his way of coughing before he spoke to the servants, his habit of passing his hand over the back of a book before opening it; and apropos of books she asked ironically of an imaginary person, for she seemed to forget my presence, where one could find the

famous book my uncle had proposed to write once upon a time. She told me that, in the morning, when he was still asleep (he slept late) she went into the library with a servant. There she picked up all the little papers that he had accumulated the day before upon his table and around his chair and all those that she could not read or which she thought were the "bad kind" she laid aside. I imagine that she took them away with her to her room and burned them out of anger at feeling herself in a way excluded from my uncle's life and confidence. She added that, being a Protestant and even worse (she herself was a Catholic), he could write nothing of profit to anyone. Another time she went so far as to remark that he had never been on the right side, either in politics or in religion, and she was going to say more when she suddenly realized that I was listening; she bit her lips and was silent for a moment. Finally, she often told me that it was enough for her to see him enter the room to have at once the desire to strike him; at such times she forced herself, she said, to recite the acts of love and charity.

This garrulous talk, composed of so many different and disconnected elements, was a source of continual wonder to me. I reasoned little concerning the character of people, but I realized confusedly that my aunt's had something strange about it and I had difficulty in repressing a certain distrust of her.

I distrusted my uncle no less; I thought he, like my aunt, had too many secrets, and I was above all

afraid of what she did not tell me about him. His language, so difficult to understand, troubled me; and besides, he had a very disagreeable nasal voice.

Twice a day we came together for meals. My uncle, who seemed to find no diet which agreed with him, remained only a few moments with us, drinking a glass of milk and tasting one or two dishes with an expression of horror; then he returned to his books. My aunt talked and ate simultaneously with equal pleasure. She sat at one end of the table, facing her father, who absorbed his food without saying a word and, in all probability, without listening.

I grew up among these three people without any one of them troubling to send me to school; but solitude had given me a taste for books and I learned, in a haphazard way, all I know today. My aunt, who never saw me without a book, congratulated me on being so studious, but never thought of asking me what I was reading. I met my uncle sometimes in the parlor, where I liked to stay. He never failed to pick up the book I was reading and, after examining the binding and the title-page, he would hand it back to me, saying, "All books are good." That delighted me and I pursued happily the most varied reading.

Toward the end of my fifteenth year my aunt died. I did not mourn her, but the house quite suddenly seemed empty. The very afternoon of her death I went to her room where she usually worked and sat down in her chair. I saw the oleanders which

shaded my uncle's window, then the garden fence, and, above the brick wall, the sycamores in the square. As I got up I tipped over the basket where my aunt kept her wool; it made me a bit sad to see the little gray balls I knew so well roll between my feet, and I looked at them for some minutes without being able to decide to put them back.

The Captain did not go to his daughter's funeral and the next day I slept rather late without his waking me. Some time later he came into my room, where, after my aunt's death, I had resumed my habit of reading. He seemed vexed to see me there and left immediately. That evening, before I went to bed, I looked for my Bible to read a chapter in it as I always do, but I hunted in vain; and, without daring to ask the Captain for it, I suspected him of having taken it. My aunt had had it for a long time.

My uncle had changed nothing in his way of living and one could understand, seeing how all his little habits persisted, what a small place his wife had occupied in his life. From the parlor, where I still read occasionally, I could hear him walking up and down his library in the same way he had done for years. Now he came out sometimes to speak to me, and I noticed that he was becoming more amiable. One day he asked me into his library, where I had not been since my aunt's death. We both sat down at the round table and he showed me some engravings that had been sent him from Europe. All of them

delighted me, but some were prettier than others. Highly colored wood-cuts were mingled with the Prisons of Piranese; the latter astonished me, and my uncle gave me one. Finally he rose and, looking at me intently, took from his pocket a paper which he unfolded. I understood why he had been so cordial; he wanted to read me the epitaph for my aunt's tomb. It ran as follows:

ELIZABETH DRAYTON

Wife of

CHARLES EDWARD DRAYTON

Born October 8, 1833

Died August 15, 1894

In This Town Which She Never Left

She lieth under the shady trees in the secrecy of the reed

My uncle seemed proud of the quotation.

"I put 'she' instead of 'he,'" he explained, "but that makes no difference. The phrase well describes the cemetery where your aunt rests."

It was true; the cemetery of Bonadventure is, as a matter of fact, on the banks of the river and is very shady. Nevertheless, how little the Bible verse applied to the poor woman! Shade, secrecy! A worse choice could not have been made.

Now I went to my uncle's library every day. He showed me his books and taught me to distinguish the rare editions from the ordinary ones; and I gradually acquired a taste for the fine papers and rich bindings, the whole exterior side of books. After about a half an hour my uncle always drew some

little manuscript from his pocket and read me parts of it. Most often it consisted of queer reflections on what he called the folly of religions, or translations of French poems which spoke of human despair and the indifference of Heaven. I listened in silence, for, being naturally religious, I was shocked by the violent and blasphemous irony of the passages; but my uncle did not appear to notice my annoyance and continued with much evident pleasure. Occasionally he stopped to explain that what he was reading formed disconnected bits of an important work which he intended to write some day. Then it seemed as if I could see my aunt hunting on the floor and on the table for the pieces of paper on which my uncle wrote his blasphemies and throwing them into the fire early in the morning before he left his room.

The Captain no longer took his meals with us. I learned that he frequented a restaurant kept by a Catholic family where the regular beverage was wine mixed with water. He no longer waked me as he used to and gradually I came almost to forget his existence.

One day a month after my aunt's death I received a letter brought by messenger. It contained two lines in handwriting I did not know: I have lived happily in my daughter's house. I am leaving now rather than live in your uncle's house. Tell him so.

I did not tell my uncle, who seemed no longer to have any memory of the Captain and did not at any

time express astonishment at his absence; I slipped the note into one of my books.

I passed a year in a solitude that was almost complete with the exception of the rather short periods which I spent with my uncle. He saw no one besides myself, and little by little, by his presence and his conversation, he communicated to me something of his unsociable and gloomy disposition. I have said that I did not go to school, for my uncle had peculiar ideas on that point as well as on many others. I went out little; the small town in which we lived did not appeal to me, probably because I was not capable of seeing its beauty and because I was not even able to compare it with others; my whole universe was limited to a few shady squares back of the sleepy little port. Nevertheless, I suspected how narrow and monotonous my life was and the epitaph which my uncle had read found within me a strange echo. It seemed to me that in a certain way I too was sleeping in *shade and secrecy*, and I grew sadder as this idea became fixed in my mind.

My sixteenth year passed in an ever-increasing anxiety. The things my uncle said seemed stupid and I conceived a horror for the little pieces of paper he took out of his pocket to read to me. Of a reflective disposition myself, I felt capable of refuting this prematurely senile little man and I endured impatiently the reading of his dissertations. To avoid them I began to take long walks.

I went preferably to the end of the town, beyond

the public gardens, as far as the port where no one ever went. The same fishing-boats could always be seen, swaying on the waves with a creaking of their mooring ropes. I sat down on a stone bench in the shade of a wall crowned with shrubs, and I watched, through the maze of masts, the motion of the water in the distance. A hundred questions came to mind. I wondered what was going to become of me, where my taste for solitude and reading would lead me, what I should do if my uncle were to die and leave me to my own devices. I knew that he was not rich and that he had taken me in against his will; I had a sort of gratitude to him for it, but it was a forced gratitude which I found disagreeable. Then I recalled a remark that I had heard an English clergyman make many years before. He was talking with my aunt and he said, patting my head:

“Confide him to us. He will like theology, and you know,” he added, laughing, “our profession is the finest in the world.”

These words seemed sweet to me even at an age when I could scarcely understand them, and now they still have a kind of indescribable charm.

One day, on my return from one of these walks, I received another note from the Captain. “Come to see me this afternoon,” he wrote. “I have something to tell you.” And he gave me an address in a street situated at the other end of the town. I went.

The Captain had a room on the second floor of a little gray house covered the whole length of the

façade with ivy and Virginia creeper. The room itself was large and furnished in the simplest way with a canopy bed, a table of light wood, and a round table similar to the one my uncle had. On this, beside a lamp, I recognized my Bible. When I entered the Captain was sitting on a little balcony which led off the room, on the same level, through a French window.

I was glad to see him in spite of the fact that I scarcely cared for him. He was too irascible and his gruff voice displeased me; but, at any rate, he did not have the nervous look my uncle did. As soon as he saw me he came toward me and said, brusquely, indicating the room with a sweeping gesture:

"You see this room. I pay my cousin Middleton five dollars a month in order to have the right to call it mine." He stopped for a moment and resumed: "I pay the restaurant where I take my meals ten dollars a month. In three years I shall have nothing left of all the money I have saved, but I hope to be taken long before that time."

I did not know what to think of this, and I was trying to find something to say in reply, when he took me by the hand and asked:

"And you? Are you still living with your uncle?"

I felt myself blushing and I answered, "Yes, sir," in a voice that was barely audible. The old man continued to look at me without letting go my hand; never had a harsher or colder glance rested on my face.

"Listen," he said after a moment. "If you want to leave your uncle, I will help you. Go and spend three years at the University of Fairfax, where I studied. Do you want to?" I remained stupid with astonishment. He waited a moment for an answer; then, without letting me reflect further, he concluded, briefly, "I take it for granted that you accept."

At this he put in my hand a small roll of bills tied with a string. "This," he explained, "will be enough for one year. Take the morning train and carry with you only the indispensable things. I think my daughter provided you with everything necessary. Don't take anything else." He forcibly folded my fingers over the bills which I was holding in my open palm. Then, with an attempt at a smile, he gave me a friendly tap on the shoulder and pushed me toward the door. I departed.

I went up one street and then another. At the end of the latter I took a road which I followed for some time. Eleven o'clock had just struck. It was September and the sea breezes had yellowed the leaves. It was cool. I wanted to walk in order to think things over. The money I had put in my trousers pocket. Should I keep it or give it back? Should I stay or leave?

Chance brought me to the iron fence of Bonaventure. This cemetery is situated on the banks of the river, sufficiently near the mouth for one to be able to hear the monotonous noise of the ocean waves as they come in contact with the river current. Giant

oaks join their branches over the silent paths. Squirrels play over the tombs and in the wild ivy that drops as far as the ground. There is no place which is more peaceful or from which the idea of sadness is more distant.

Without considering what road I should take, entirely absorbed in my thoughts, I started down one of the paths which lead to the river. I did not know what I was going to do. Certainly I was tempted to depart, but, leaving my uncle's house without asking his permission, was that not equivalent to closing its doors forever on me? Whom could I count on if my uncle left me to shift for myself? On the Captain? I was sure that he had just given me a large part of all the money he had in the world and that, at the end of my first year in college, he would tell me to earn myself what money I needed to complete my studies. I should, then, have to count on myself alone. I was not ignorant of the fact that many poor young men worked their way through the colleges in the North. But what could I do? Give private lessons, like some students? The very idea made me smile. What could I teach? My entire learning was limited to a rather exact knowledge of the Scriptures and some notions of general literature. Nevertheless, I had to decide, and decide at once; that idea came to me so strongly that I stopped short. I perceived then that my absent-mindedness had brought me to a solitary grove where, through the trees, the great black reeds could be seen bending over the muddy

waters of the stream. In the silence the varied song of a mocking-bird would reëcho and as suddenly stop as if the bird were tired of its calls. I had never been there before. I did not even know that there were places so tranquil and so beautiful in the enormous cemetery. For a moment I was delighted with this solitude and I was planning to return, when I began to say aloud, and almost in spite of myself, "I shall not return, since I am leaving tomorrow." At this moment I noticed some one walking toward me. I immediately left the grove and, taking another path, I soon came to the principal avenue of the cemetery.

When I reached home I went to my room. It was something very new for me to come to a decision and I was quite excited over planning my trip. I filled my valise with everything which belonged to me and it was soon done, for I had only a few clothes and some books. Then I wrote to my uncle to tell him that I was leaving his house and to thank him, since it was necessary, for all his kindness to me. I sealed the letter and posted it immediately.

I saw my uncle at dinner a few hours later. He was as silent as usual and I took pleasure in imagining the little voyage of my letter, in imagining its passing from hand to hand and coming to him at the very moment when, opposite me, he tasted of a dish with a wry grimace. He soon left the table and I remained alone; but as soon as I got up he returned and asked me to step into his library for a moment. I followed him.

He seemed more preoccupied than usual and his eyes had a fixed stare. I sat down in my regular place by the table and he remained standing beside the lamp which he had placed on the mantelpiece. He immediately drew a paper from his pocket and, without raising his eyes to mine, began to read it rapidly and indistinctly. I was surprised to find that his sentences were more harmonious than usual and it made me think that he had copied the passage somewhere. After a moment he pulled his handkerchief out and wiped his forehead, muttering something that I could not understand. I excused myself and he said in a louder tone, but turning aside a little:

“Will you take down some notes as I dictate them?”

I was about to ask him for a pen and paper, when my glance fell upon a large sheet of paper placed before me, with a new pen and an inkstand beside it. I congratulated myself upon the imminence of my departure.

My uncle started to dictate a rather long sentence which I wrote down without understanding the meaning. Certain memories came back to me. I recalled my uncle's manner when he used to speak of the important work he was thinking of writing, the way he had of saying that *later* I could use all his books, for, up to that time, he had allowed me to read only those in the parlor. What plans did he have? Why did he not confide in me if I were to have some part in them? I detested this timidity which I will-

ingly took for hypocrisy. It seemed to me absolutely odious at the moment, and, driven by anger and scorn, I wrote in the middle of a sentence: "No, uncle, I shall never be your secretary."

At last he finished and asked me to read what I had written. At the first paragraph I stopped with surprise and asked him what he was having me read. He replied with a simplicity which further astonished me that it was the first part of the preface to his work. I could hardly believe it, for these sentences were excellent, it seemed to me, and could not be compared in any way with the wretched things he usually read me. Even today I suspect him of having simply copied them from some famous author. What a trait I add to his character!

I read my paper to the end, omitting, of course, the little sentence I had interpolated. My uncle listened to me with a delighted expression, and when I had finished told me to put the manuscript in a drawer which he designated.

"That is where I put the completed pages of my book," he said, as if he wished me to know at once all the details of my new work. The drawer was, as a matter of fact, half full of papers covered with a hasty scrawl. The one I put in was, I flatter myself, in a handwriting at once more careful and more firm.

My uncle did not detain me. He thanked me and wished me good night; but he did it so gravely that it seemed almost like a farewell and I wondered anx-

iously if he knew about my plans. On reflection it was impossible; but is not this air of understanding often seen in people who cannot suspect what is taking place about them, but who, nevertheless, act and talk as if they did? They make lightly remarks they think unimportant, and it happens that their words go to the very heart of a question of which they are totally ignorant. At the moment I opened the door my uncle said, gravely:

“I hope that you are happy with me, Daniel.”

I turned brusquely and saw him smiling, but I found no answer within me. He gave me a wave of the hand and sat down at his table. I went out.

Early the next morning, while my uncle was still sleeping, I locked my valise and departed. It was the moment I had decided upon, although the train I was to take would leave much later. I calculated that my letter would reach my uncle at just about the same time as my departure. This idea, which had delighted me the night before, made me pensive at present and I regretted certain aspects of my conduct. Had I not deceived my uncle? In spite of all one can do, a person to whom one lies—and I had lied—becomes a sort of judge and grows in stature in the eyes of the liar. I felt this very strongly, but the trip soon dissipated my unhappiness and I gave myself up entirely to looking out of the window at the landscape which I was seeing for the first time and to dreaming of unknown bliss. The next afternoon I reached the town of Fairfax.

It is situated in the bottom of a valley and, in the train, one comes upon it quite suddenly at the end of a chain of hills which hide it like a curtain. All the streets are lined with trees and paved with pink bricks, but the houses are almost concealed behind little gardens planted with boxwood. It is a grave and silent place, very different from my native town. The people do not rest in the heat of the afternoon, fanning themselves upon their porches, and it seems as if they never go out, for the streets are always deserted.

I hired a public carriage from the station to the university. It took me through the town to the beginning of a great park bordered with trees. Over the gate there was an inscription in iron letters which read:

Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.

I picked up my valise and got out. With the end of his whip the coachman pointed out a building the top of which could be seen among the trees at the end of the avenue.

"All you have to do is to go straight ahead," he said, "but if you come to study you have plenty of time. The university doesn't open for two weeks."

I blushed. It really had not paid to hurry so in order to arrive two weeks before anyone else. What was I going to do in the meantime? My face must have betrayed my confusion, for the driver, who was a

young man dressed much like a farmer, cried out to me above the noise of the carriage as it moved off again:

“No harm meant!”

I turned my back on him and, passing through the gate, started along the path. Squirrels came jumping to my feet and looked at me fearlessly in expectation, I imagine, of delicacies they were in the habit of receiving from the students. The wind blew violently through the branches high above my head. I walked rapidly. It seemed to me that I could be seen from the houses that bordered the campus on the other side of the road. Finally I arrived at the building which the driver had pointed out.

A few minutes' walk gave me an idea of the university. It is composed of but two large buildings built in the classic style and facing each other at the ends of an immense rectangular green. A row of small houses stands on either side of the green, parallel to it and separated from it by a covered passageway. Huge trees of different kinds grow somewhat at random in the enclosure.

I made the circuit of the green and returned to the larger of the two buildings, the one I had perceived from the fence. It is a copy of the Roman Pantheon, but, with the exception of the white marble columns, built entirely of brick. A broad terrace surrounds it completely, and on one side commands a view of the town through the trees, on the other a view of vast meadows and little woods cut by a road

leading to the hills. I sat down on the balustrade overlooking the town and began to reflect.

I had two weeks to spend in a town where I knew no one. What was I going to do? Should not I try first to find a room? The thought of going and knocking at the door of a strange house did not appeal to me, and, nevertheless, I knew that I should end by doing so. However, the desire to postpone as long as possible that disagreeable moment gave me an idea which I thought excellent. I would go and spend the night in a hotel which I had noticed near the station, so that I should not have to think of my room until the next day. Then, little by little, I could get information regarding the different boarding-houses in the town. I was about to go when I saw some one coming toward me. I put my hand on my valise and waited for him to approach.

The stranger bowed to me. He was tall and dressed very simply in an old-fashioned suit of dark blue. He looked severe and willful. He seemed older than I and at first I thought I had seen him before without being able to remember where. I was astonished that I had not heard him approach, and felt troubled and happy at the same time. In spite of the sun which shone upon the terrace there was something mysterious about the silence of this solitary place. I have a natural tendency toward the most singular reveries. For a moment I imagined that I was mistaken and that there was no one in front of me.

Nevertheless, I bowed in my turn. When he was

close to me, the young man stopped and said: "I can guess that you are here two weeks in advance and that you have just found it out. Am I mistaken?"

I shook my head.

"I guessed it easily," he said, "because I am in the same position. But I see that you have not even found a room," he added, looking at my valise. "I haven't either. Would you like me to go with you to look for one?"

I did not answer. He continued:

"We're here so early that we ought to get the best in town. I should advise you to select one near the university."

I hesitated for an instant. I had a sudden feeling that much depended upon my reply, but the stranger had an honest look which decided me. I was also rather happy, in a place where I knew nobody, to find some one so obliging. I thanked him and, taking up my valise, I jumped down from the balustrade. I secretly hoped that he would undertake all the little negotiations that I dreaded and I asked him if he knew the town well, if he had some house in view. He said no.

We went down toward the fence, the inscription on which he read aloud, adding, as if what he said continued the verse:

"And this truth is not found so easily as you believe nor in the manner in which you think."

I did not speak, for I was afraid he might say something disagreeable about a quotation of which

I was very fond, and I did not wish to quarrel with him. But he said nothing more and we went silently up the avenue bordered by the little gray houses which could just be seen behind the gardens. Several of them had signs, *Rooms to let*, on one of the columns of their porches.

I opened one of the garden gates after deliberating awhile with my companion. There was no great choice to be made, all the houses on the avenue being built on the same plan. That is about all I noticed and I made the remark to my companion just to gain a little time. I tried to make him go first and to walk behind him, but he seemed to understand my maneuver and said, with a certain brusqueness:

"You are the one to do the talking, since you are the one looking for a room. I am going to get one in the town."

This vexed me. I saw that he had guessed the weakness of my character and that he was resolved not to give in to it.

I rang the bell. After a rather long time a woman opened the door, an old woman, very straight and tall, dressed in black, a bonnet with long ribbons on her head. I found her manner so severe that I was seized with timidity and spoke very indistinctly. She listened without interrupting me and then said gently:

"Am I to understand that you are a student and want a room?"

I blushed and answered, "Yes." What did my

companion think of my assurance? I did not dare to look at him and he said nothing.

The old lady led us up to the second floor and went in before us into a large room, the blinds of which she at once opened. Sycamores shaded the windows; a pale light fell upon the shiny blackened floor. In one corner there was a four-post bed and in another a very simple table and a cane-seat chair. Everything seemed immaculately clean, but even if the room had been badly kept I should have taken it in spite of everything. I was in a hurry to get the transaction over.

"It is very satisfactory," I said in a low voice.

"It is quite sufficient," replied the old lady, who was standing in the middle of the room, her hands clasped in front of her.

"I should like this room very much," I said after a moment of silence.

She bowed. "It will be ten dollars a month plus fifteen dollars for board."

I nodded in my turn and put my valise down on a chair.

"We dine at six," she continued; "breakfast is at eight, lunch at two. We will wake you every morning at seven."

She went out without waiting for an answer, and closed the door behind her with marked precautions.

"Well," said my companion, who had not opened his mouth during all this little scene in which I had shown so little decision, "are you satisfied?"

I was very much pleased, but I was astonished that it could be done so quickly and so simply in spite of so much hesitation on my part. As far as that went, I had not met a single obstacle to my plans since I had left my uncle's house. I had, however, expected many difficulties because it seemed to me normal that there should be. I was much surprised that so few efforts were necessary to change entirely the whole aspect of my life and to give it an air of independence. Had I not now a room of my own?

We stayed in until dinner-time. I unpacked my valise while my companion, sitting in the chair, watched me. From time to time he asked me questions concerning my tastes and my occupations, but in so frank and discreet a manner that it would have been in bad grace not to answer him. Often his questions seemed futile and I wanted to laugh at what I took for great ingenuousness. He asked me about each one of my things as I took it out, wanting to know if I had had it long, if I was attached to it, if I did not prefer it to another. This did not displease me. I was surprised and flattered that anyone should be so interested in me and I amused myself by giving still more details than were asked.

When all was in order and after I had slipped, with an instinctive movement of prudence, the roll of bills into a pocket in my jacket, I perceived that it was beginning to get dark and that I could hardly see in the room. I tried to light the lamp on the table, but it was empty and I found only a candle in a pewter

holder. My companion said nothing more, but I guessed that he was watching me; I was embarrassed and felt at ease only after the light, feeble as it was, began to shine about us. Finally he rose and said:

“You have not thought of asking me my name; but, as you will see me often and you will have to know what name to give me, call me Paul.”

With these words he shook hands with me and left. I saw him go without regret because I wanted to be alone, and I amused myself by arranging on the mantelpiece the books I had brought with me. There was *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley, Byron's *Vampyre*, some novels of Hawthorne, and some translations from the French; but these last belonged to my uncle and I intended to return them some day. I was greatly attached to these books. I had read them a great number of times and several of them were badly worn, but I loved them only the more. I often put one in my pocket when I went out. In a word, I thought more often of these fifteen or twenty volumes worn by long usage than of anything else which had entered my life. I felt that I should not have had the same pleasure in putting them on the mantelpiece if Paul, since that was his name, had been present. I also had the impression that, as I was taking them out of my valise, he had looked at them disparagingly; in any case, he said hardly anything about them and did not ask to see them, which seemed an extraordinary lack of curiosity.

Suddenly a little bell was shaken at the foot of the stairs. I put out the candle and went down to the dining-room. It was a rather small room, badly lighted and gloomy. A long, bare table occupied the largest part and one had to squeeze up against the wall to get around it. On it were some large plates and some baskets filled with bread. On the wall hung a colored portrait of General Lee and a reproduction of a historic picture. I sat down. After a few minutes, as no one came, I began, without appetite, to eat bread to pass the time. I am subject to sudden fits of melancholy which I attribute to my solitary life. I find difficulty in getting over them because I do not understand why they come and I suffer a great deal for that reason. It is generally at night that this melancholy strikes me and I have the feeling then that the night which has come over the earth will never depart. At such times reason is of no avail and all my thinking only confirms the despair which seizes me. My only hope lies in trying to read.

I found myself suddenly in this frame of mind, and it was for that reason, while waiting for dinner to be served, that I began to eat bread. I regretted suddenly what I had done; I saw all the advantages of my past life, the complete absence of real cares, my perfect freedom to use my time as I desired. Why had I abandoned all that? Because my uncle made me pass a stupid half hour every day in his library? I felt as if the bread I was eating was going to choke me.

Finally a young negress opened the door and closed it behind her with her foot. She carried a dish which she put on the table, looking at me with a distrustful air. She was dressed in striped calico and walked dragging her slippers. As she was leaving she put her hand over her mouth to stifle a sudden burst of laughter and closed the door quickly behind her. I heard some one scolding her in the kitchen.

I ate almost nothing and went back to my room as soon as possible. A brushwood fire had been lighted during my absence, for the night was cool. Also, instead of the candle, there was now a lamp with a big, unpolished glass globe. I drew my chair up to the fire, took a little book out of my pocket, and opened it at random; and I began to read, munching the two apples which I had been given for dessert.

I had been reading about an hour when my new friend entered the room. I had not heard him come up the stairs and I was so surprised to see him suddenly standing before me that he noticed it and asked me if he had frightened me. Then he asked what I was reading and I handed him the book. It was a translation of a French novel. He shrugged his shoulders and gave it back to me at once. I put it back in my pocket.

His face was so calm and self-contained that I took pleasure in this moment of uncertainty in watching him. I realized that my courage had returned on his arrival and I thanked him for coming. He also seemed

happy to be with me and in a humor to talk. He explained that he had dined in town and that he was going to look for a room in the morning. Then he asked me, with a considerable show of interest, what I expected to study this year. I answered very willingly because I felt less timid with him, and I told him my plans in the greatest detail, forming most of them on the spur of the moment and at random. Gradually I reached the point of telling him the story of my flight and, in a rather natural manner, I related several events in my past life. He was standing in front of me, leaning on the table, listening attentively. From time to time he interrupted me and asked for more details concerning some things which I had passed over too quickly. In a word, I saw that he was interested in my story. I gained much comfort from this confession to a stranger and felt that I was relieving myself in that way of the weight of a great many things. It seemed to me also that my life, or rather a tedious and mediocre part of it, was ending and that another, happier, and more active life was beginning for me that very evening. I could not accuse myself of any grave mistake; but that very fact seemed to me like a fault, a sort of sin of omission. For the first time I wondered how it was that I had not suffered from the mysterious temptations spoken of in the Scriptures and I had the impression that something unknown, at once beneficent and fearful, had been lacking in my youth. I should have liked to have humiliating sins to con-

fess, and only a natural respect for the truth prevented me from inventing some.

When I had finished, Paul straightened up and looked at me in silence. Seeing his eyes fixed upon me—their expression was so severe—I thought, “I should not like to have any disagreement with you.” But I sustained his look with an inner tranquillity which surprised me.

“Show me your books,” he said at last.

“There they are,” I answered, pointing to the mantelpiece; and, so that he could see them better, I rose and moved the lamp nearer.

He looked at them for a minute, but I could not see in his face the slightest expression of pleasure. I congratulated myself at this, as upon one superiority which I discovered that I had over him.

“Are these all?” he asked when he had finished his inspection.

I nodded.

“You forget the one you put in your pocket.”

“That is true,” I said; “we can put it with the others.” And I set it last in the row. We parted a short time afterward, but not without deciding to meet the next day.

DREAM

That night and the following one I had the same dream several times in succession. I was sleeping profoundly, but I saw things about me as clearly as if I had been awake. A white light showed the

rectangle of the window on the floor. The tulle curtains were moving in the breeze and seemed alive.

I heard the even breathing of a sleeping person: it was my own and, by an inexplicable doubling of my personality, I saw myself in bed. My face was white; at times my lips opened a bit and then I heard a groan which frightened me. My hands were lying on the coverlet. My breathing became more difficult and had a hoarse sound which I did not recognize. Was it I sleeping thus? I leaned over my face in the hope that I was mistaken; but it was I. Then I tried to push back the hair that covered the forehead of the sleeper and wipe the perspiration from his cheeks, but I immediately felt a great weight on my hands and I saw them lying on the coverlet. The fingers moved slightly and this effort made the perspiration pour down the cheeks of the sleeper.

Nevertheless, the eyes were open, looking at the ceiling. I leaned over them, but they did not see me. The lips trembled as if they were trying to form a sound. Suddenly they separated and I saw the teeth and then the tongue and a cry came forth from my breast. It seemed to me that I had become free and, abandoning the body stretched out upon the bed, I dashed toward the door.

It opened violently before I could reach it and Paul entered the room. He was bareheaded, his hair falling about his face; his clothes were torn and covered with mud. I tried to speak to him, but the words would not leave my lips. He approached the

bed. Then I saw the body stiffen and both hands grip the covers. A horrible convulsion went over it from head to foot, the eyes rolled up in their sockets and the body fell back upon the bed.

Now we were outside and walking fast. We were going toward the university and the earth was slippery under our feet because it had been raining ever since nightfall. It seemed as if we walked for hours. I no longer knew where I was going, but Paul went on in front of me, turning from time to time and looking at me with a fixed stare.

We had taken a road which went across a field and then into a wood; and, while passing through this wood, I perceived that we were going uphill. We continued to do so for a very long time, when suddenly Paul began to run, raising his arms and crying out:

“The end of the race!”

Then I made a new effort and ran after my guide. He soon came to a stop at the top of a wooded crest, and when I reached him I found that we were on a long road the end of which I could not see; but Paul took me by the hand and we went on to the end of this road. There were no trees there and I saw that we were in a plain alongside a deep abyss. We stopped. From the bottom there rose a loud, continuous roar. I was afraid, but nevertheless, I looked down. Dawn was lighting up the sky and I saw rushing waters dashing violently between two rocky walls. At times a hollow formed in the middle of

the current and I perceived unfathomable depths from which mounted distant cries; but impetuous waves covered it over immediately. Then I heard Paul shout:

“The source of living waters!”

At the same time I fell unconscious to the ground.

When I came to myself I was again alone in my room. My body was stretched out on the bed, but not in the way I had left it. The legs and arms were broken and bleeding everywhere as if the skin had been torn from them and the face was changed in a manner which I cannot bring myself to describe. Such a feeling of fright seized me then that I began to pant as animals do when they are afraid, and I saw at that moment the lips part and the mouth gradually open to give a cry; and the cry that came forth from that face awoke me.

I had that dream three times, and each time I woke in a greater terror than before because it seemed to me that the dream was becoming more definite and approaching reality more and more closely. But just what reality? I knew now all the details of that nocturnal race. I knew that, after passing the university, I would take the road which led to the wood, that I would pass through that wood and arrive thus at the road which I should have to follow to the end. There I would hear the roaring of the waters, I would be frightened, and I would faint away. But that fear was nothing. The real fear

awaited me in my room, and that was so awful that it dispelled the nightmare.

When I awoke for the third time the sky was becoming pale and a gray light came in through the window. Nevertheless, it was still very dark and I was afraid I would go to sleep again. I got up and lit my lamp; then I closed the window and sat down at my table. My head fell over on my breast and I could not succeed in keeping my eyes open; so, in order not to give myself up again to horrible dreams, I forced myself to write.

At first I traced a few words with difficulty without thinking of what I was doing. And I saw that I had written *The Source of Living Waters*; but suddenly my pen became light and I started to write as if some one were directing my hand.

I think I must have passed a good half hour in that way. I recall that the scratching of the pen upon the paper occupied my whole attention. Finally dawn appeared. I let my head fall on the table and slept without dreaming until morning. When I opened my eyes my first care was to burn what I had written. I could not understand what it meant and I was ashamed at having let myself go to this sort of ridiculous amusement.

After breakfast I put on my best suit to go to the office of the secretary of the university, where I had to register. I hoped that Paul would go with me, but he did not come, and I left about ten o'clock. It was a beautiful day; everything was

quiet and I felt calmer than on the day of my arrival.

I discovered that the office would not be open for a week and, as I had nearly three hours before lunch, I decided to take a walk. I left the university by the opposite road to that which I had first taken. I do not know why, after a moment, I began to walk rapidly, and more and more rapidly, until I was soon out of breath. I had reached a ravine road covered with large stones against which I stumbled at every moment. Again I was troubled and it seemed to me suddenly that I was fleeing from some one. But have I said that I am subject to these fits of terror the origin of which I cannot succeed in discovering? That is my infirmity; that is the sad and shameful part of my life and what I suffer at not being able to explain. Why am I not like everyone else? Sometimes I have the feeling that there is behind everything that I do and everything that I think all sorts of things which I shall never understand. Do they not come from me and from my brain? And if they do come from me, why do they remain so alien to me? Don't I belong to myself? Is there a part of me which is beyond my reach?

These ideas which I am writing down at random and do not dare to reread have almost always occupied me, at least ever since I began to reflect about myself. Sometimes they take in my mind a terrifying objectivity and, in a way which I cannot describe exactly, they seem to assume a physical appearance

and become hostile. At such moments to what childish gestures my misery drives me! I put my fingers in my ears. (I should not write that if I thought it would be read.)

In the ravine road, then, I was seized with this strange terror and I thought I was being pursued. I closed my eyes in a sort of vertigo and commenced to run straight ahead, crying out when a sudden pain took me in the head and forced me to come to a sudden halt. For some moments I remained dazed.

When I opened my eyes again I perceived that I was on the edge of a wood which rose in a sharp incline. How did it happen that I had not seen it so close to me? I had thought it was much further away. My terror had ceased (it always stops when I begin to run) but I was uneasy and I retraced my steps. I tried to walk slowly and to be master of myself, to walk like everyone else.

Soon I reached the main road which goes around the university. Several people passed, some of whom bowed as if they knew me. This politeness touched me. Among others, a minister stopped and began to talk to me. I think he was the chaplain of the university, for he seemed to know all the professors and he talked to me about all the courses that each one gave. He advised me to study mathematics and asked if I read my Bible assiduously. We then walked a way together. He talked in a gentle, firm voice and he asked me everything a man of his cloth usually does. The question of the Bible brought us to that

of prayer and then to the question of purity. In regard to the latter, I told him, as he encouraged me to talk of it, that I kept myself as from the fire, from reading heretical books, even from having any in my room, for impurity is held in such abomination in the Bible that it seems the most difficult sin to pardon. He told me then that one must be careful not to confuse things, and he left me after a few minutes. I had taken a great deal of pleasure in his conversation.

I returned to my room after two hours and found Paul seated before the glowing ashes of what must have been a large fire. I looked immediately at the mantelpiece; it was empty.

"You are looking for your books," said Paul, who had followed my glance. "I have bought them from you for twenty-five cents a volume. You had fourteen. Count it up for yourself."

I looked at him and said nothing. He took from his pocket some bills and a piece of silver, which he put into my hand.

"Count the money," said he.

I was too surprised not to obey, and mechanically I counted the bills. Suddenly I asked him:

"But where are my books?"

"I burned them," said he.

I realized at that moment that I had never before experienced the bitterest kind of grief, and these simple words opened up to me an unknown world. I let the money drop. I did not think of ask-

ing Paul why he had destroyed them; I believe I did not even think of being angry with him. My only idea was that ashes alone remained. He picked up the money and put it in one of the pockets in my jacket.

“Keep it safe,” said he. “You will need it.”

As I looked at him it suddenly came to me that it was he whom I had seen in the cemetery of Bonadventure when I was walking in the grove.

He took me by the arm and forced me to sit down in the chair.

(The first part of the MS. stops here. The second is dated two days later.)

September 8.

Many memories crowd in upon me, but I must hurry. After Paul advised me to keep my money, he rose and left, and that day I did not see him again. Then it was that, to free myself of my sadness, I resolved to write an account of everything which had happened to me from my childhood up to the present time. I felt, in fact, that there was something extraordinary in my life and that I should understand better what it was about after I had written down my recollections. I worked at it all that day and, not feeling like sleeping, all that night. As it progressed, I took pleasure in the task. The morning of the following day I had written what I thought would be the last line of my manuscript, for I did not then want to

add anything to it, when I made a discovery which plunged me into consternation.

The day of my arrival I had sent to the laundry a small bundle of linen. It was brought back to me washed two days later, and I looked for the pocket-book which contained my money. It was not in my coat and I hunted everywhere for it without success. All I could find was the small sum that Paul had given me. The laundress who was present and saw my anxiety told me she could wait a few days for the money, and departed. I could have paid her with what I had left, but my strength failed me and I remained for some time in a sort of stupor.

Just then Paul came to visit me. I had practically recovered from my surprise and was wondering what I was going to do. He arrived, then, at just the right time to advise me. But I am made up of strange contradictions. I suspected him strongly of having stolen my money the same day he burned my books. (I recalled, in fact, that I had left my pocketbook by mistake in the pocket of the suit I had laid aside when I put on my newer one.) Why did I feel no indignation? Why did I feel, on the contrary, a real joy at seeing him again? I went so far as to tell him my embarrassment, as if I did not realize the irony of my situation. I had the thief before me, I was sure of it; and, nevertheless, what did I say to myself? Something like this:

“He is good and you must ask him to help you. What he has done is of no importance.”

These ideas entered my brain so forcibly that I was as dazed as one may be in the midst of a tumult.

"What am I to do?" I asked him.

"There are twenty ways of earning money," he answered. "Haven't your books taught you anything?"

The question seemed so cruel, but at the same time so just, that I could not help but consider it a moment. It explained my whole life; I did not know how to do anything. I had wasted my time reading without gaining any profit from it. Whole years had passed and I had spent them as if my uncle were to live eternally and look out for me to the end of my days. I was frightened at the helplessness I discovered in myself and I was tempted to cry out to Paul:

"Do not abandon me. I will submit to you in everything. You command and I will do whatever you say."

But my pride held me back. In my despair I began to look about me, and suddenly I saw myself in a mirror on the wall as I had never seen myself up to that moment: I was the image of uncertainty and fear. My eyes were staring, my mouth half open; I saw my breast rise and fall with the effort of breathing. I tried to turn my head away, but it seemed to me that it was held in the direction of the mirror and I watched in spite of myself that face which would neither turn away nor close its eyes. Had I never noticed that my lips were nearly white, thin,

and without strength? My cheeks were pale; my eyes, set too far apart, gave me a strange appearance which frightened me. Had I never seen my face before? I was suddenly struck with a horror of myself and I clapped both hands over my eyes.

Paul was sitting facing me. When I finally dropped my hands I saw him with the same lucidity with which I had seen myself in the mirror; but I cannot describe him. All the words which come to my mind seem inexact and weak when I try to apply them to him. His features are irregular and massive; nevertheless, there is something so peculiar in his glance, something so calm and so terrible, that it seems as if his face radiates light. I feel sure that he cannot make a mistake or do any evil. I feel, too, that, without despising me, he sees all my weakness, and that he is the only one who can guide me.

I made a violent effort and said to him:

“I will do anything you wish if you will consent to help me.”

Then he began to reflect, and I remained motionless before him for some minutes. My heart was beating horribly and I thought:

“I will let you make all my plans. I will do whatever you tell me to do.”

Finally he raised his eyes to me and answered:

“You must fight your own battles.”

I said nothing and almost immediately Paul departed.

Once alone, I gave myself up for some time to a

horrible despair. So I had made a mistake and the one person upon whom I had counted was withdrawing his support. My pride suffered cruelly because I had humiliated myself before a stranger who was lacking to such a degree in the most ordinary charity. But there is a sort of habit of despair which is called resignation and I attained this rather quickly. I told myself that I deserved the vexations that I was having and that I would undergo all kinds of others as long as I did not crush out my vanity and my presumption. I felt a bitter joy in repeating those things to myself and, so to speak, in passing in review the whole extent of my misfortune.

And suddenly it seemed to me that my despair was groundless because the very reason for it was illusory. I cannot describe the violence with which that idea struck me; it was as if a brilliant light had penetrated my soul and turned my life inside out for me to see. How had I been able to deceive myself so long and become so attached to books, my money, myself, and my peace of mind? Would not real despair rather come from feeling oneself the victim of the material comforts which I had coveted? I was so moved by this sort of revelation that I lay down on my bed in order not to fall. Now the world could come to an end and life depart from me. All visible things existed only for my temptation, and, by an impulse of the soul which broke my last resistance, I renounced in an instant the possession of all these things, all affection for the world, all hope of earthly

happiness. I had the impression then that my mind was separating itself from my body and that I was being torn from myself. My hands began to tremble and the perspiration poured from my forehead. I gave a cry and rose, but immediately I fell as if some one had hurled me to the ground.

I do not know how long I remained thus, but when I got up it was dark and the rain was beating up against the panes. I felt a sharp pain at the base of my brain and a great weakness in my whole body. Lighting the lamp, I found a note signed by Paul. I read it and let it fall. It contained these words:

“There will come some one strong who will take you under his protection and will guide you, if you do not resist him, along life’s paths.”

I did not sleep all night. At dawn I wrote the above.

(The MS. ends with these words. Letters or fragments of letters follow which will perhaps explain certain obscure passages in Daniel O’Donovan’s story.)

I

THE EDITOR OF THE FAIRFAX JOURNAL TO MR.
CHARLES DRAYTON

FAIRFAX, September, 1895.

DEAR SIR:

I shall not surprise you when I say that the tragic fate of Mr. Daniel O’Donovan has caused here a very great emotion at the same time as it has aroused,

concerning everything relating in any way to your nephew, a most exacting curiosity. A great number of people ask to visit his room and some maintain that it is *haunted*. I ask your pardon for giving these details, which can only cause you grief, but you will understand from what follows the importance they have for you and me.

My profession obliges me to keep myself informed concerning everything which happens in our town, and I went myself to Mr. O'Donovan's room the day after his death. Miss Smyth, who owns the house, accompanied me, and we were the first to visit the room after Mr. O'Donovan left it. We found in the drawer of the table a rather long manuscript which could belong only to the last occupant of the room. I read it immediately. Miss Smyth began it with me, but she soon stopped and went out of the room, leaving me alone. After a few moments she returned with a book in which all her roomers are expected to register and to set down the usual information. Mr. O'Donovan had done this and his name was the last in the book. By means of that autograph, therefore, we were able to assure ourselves that the manuscript found in the drawer was, as we had presumed, in his handwriting.

Miss Smyth allowed me to take the manuscript away on condition that I hand it over to the authorities after I had finished reading it. I did not hesitate; I sent it immediately to press. I think you will approve, sir, when I tell you that your nephew is being

accused of having put an end to his life. This atrocious idea tends to spread, and it will become a certainty in the minds of many people if some one does not rise and attack an error so insulting to the memory of the dead and to the dignity of his family. Now I am alone able to establish that Mr. O'Donovan never intended to commit suicide, as appears very clearly in his manuscript. This manuscript is, then, in press. The proofs will be sent to you this very evening. I hope, sir, that you will understand the reasons . . . [etc.]

II

CHARLES DRAYTON TO THE EDITOR

SAVANNAH, *September, 1895.*

DEAR SIR:

You are entirely free to publish the manuscript you mention and your reasons for so doing seem to me perfectly justifiable. It is, however, to be regretted that you could not have communicated the manuscript to me before sending it to press (I still await the proofs which you promise) and it is a bit ironical to ask my permission to print it when your presses are already in motion.

It is understood that you take the responsibility for all the little calumnies which may have slipped into my nephew's story. I pardon him for them if there are any, because he had the habit of misrepresenting unintentionally the facts which he related; more than once I have had occasion to notice it. The

public, however, is ignorant of that mental defect and may well take for truth in the pages which you publish what in reality is only fiction. For that reason, I think it very necessary that you publish at the end of my nephew's manuscript the material I submit to you herewith. It concerns me as well as my nephew. It will correct the errors which he may have made, and, at the same time, it will complete his story in places where it may seem insufficient.

Tuesday next I shall be in Fairfax. I shall then have the opportunity of discussing this affair with you at greater length. Meanwhile, here is my manuscript.

You know, perhaps, that I am a widower. I shall say nothing about my wife except that we did not live on good terms and that six months after our marriage I realized the mistake I had made in marrying her. I resolved to see her the least possible; and, since circumstances forced us to live in the same house, I decided to spend the daytime locked in my library. Do not believe that this confinement was painful to me, for I love books and study above everything else. I enjoyed perfect solitude, never answering when there was a knock on the door and never leaving my library except to take my meals. You may guess the scenes which ensued. I shall give no account of them because they do not concern my subject directly.

Years passed. My wife was naturally garrulous and she suffered from not being able to talk to me.

She went out little, for reasons which are unnecessary here. She read a great deal. Suddenly I perceived that she had become old. It is difficult to realize that a person with whom one lives is growing old and the ravages of age are not noticed, if I may say so, until they are complete and when they are evident to everyone. My wife now knit a part of the day and the rest of the time she went to church, for she had started to practice the Roman Catholic religion in all its details. She dressed in black like a widow and she hated me as a woman hates a husband who should be dead and is not. She transferred her affection to her father, who had taken up his residence in my home the very week that I was married. He is a crabbed old man who despises me because I did not serve four years, as he did, under a Southern general. He left my house after the death of his daughter.

Nine years after my marriage my brother-in-law, whom I rarely saw, succumbed to a rather mysterious illness, a sort of chronic melancholia which he fought, or tried to fight, by means of drugs. I do not know to what excesses he went, but he died when barely forty years of age. His wife went crazy a short time afterward and is now living with her parents. My brother-in-law had a little boy of ten and it happened that I was the only one able to take care of him. I did not want to do it, but the law intervened and forced my hand.

When he arrived at my house Daniel was a sickly little boy with uneasy and deceitful ways. He

was poorly dressed and brought with him an enormous valise which contained, as I remember, some changes of clothes and a few picture books. I confess that I do not like children and I noticed in him things which I thought peculiar and rather disagreeable. He almost never spoke when I was present and seemed to be of a suspicious nature. When he thought himself alone he would look about him anxiously and hum in a low tone. Sometimes he would suddenly leave the room where he was and run shouting into the garden. His aunt would reprove him at such times and he would stop and turn red. I observed him a great deal without his suspecting it, wishing to see to just what degree he had inherited the disposition of his parents.

He seemed much inclined to fall into religion and the superstitious practices of his aunt, and I suspected her of sending him secretly to the catechism. I tried to save him from that influence and, when I could, to inculcate in him a few correct ideas. Several times a month I took him into my study and lectured him a little, speaking to him especially of the duty of children to be docile and of what he owed to his neighbor and himself. Nevertheless, I was careful not to go too far for fear of doing violence to his natural tendencies. I have, in fact, an individual theory on the education of children. I am of the opinion that they should be allowed to develop freely and as they desire. They should play if they like to play and, if they like to read, they should read what

they wish. They will end by separating the good from the evil and by discovering what is best suited to them. I did not, then, send Daniel to school. I left him to himself, reserving to myself the right to correct in him what seemed to be artificial and contrary to reason. I forbade him to go to church, but I left him all liberty to do anything else. He was fond of books and I allowed him to choose from the parlor book-case any which appealed to him.

Meanwhile he was growing up before my eyes and I began to make all sorts of plans for him. He spoke less and less and the only one to whom he talked with any degree of freedom was my wife. He looked sickly and he would often remain long hours sitting in the garden, sometimes with a book, but generally idle, his hands folded on his knees. When he was seventeen years old I decided to employ him as my secretary and to use, by developing it, the taste which I divined he had for literary things. I am engaged in philosophical researches . . . [etc.]

(The rest of this letter is without interest and adds nothing new to Daniel O'Donovan's story. Its author seems to have written it only for the pleasure of describing himself.)

III

FAIRFAX, September, 1895.

DEAR SIR:

Here is the account of what happened in my home between the fourth and the tenth of September last

—that is to say, from the arrival of Daniel O'Donovan at my house up to the moment when he left it. Untrue statements are beginning to be reported. I beg you to give credence only to the facts as I relate them.

The fourth of September I was called to the door by a somewhat timid ring and I thought, before opening the door, that it was a beggar; so I was somewhat surprised to see on the porch a well-dressed young man carrying a valise. He was a student, but you know that none ever comes before the second week in September; and I was astonished that this young man should have started so early to hunt for a room. He was pale and stooped a bit as if he were tired. I did not like his expression very much, but he seemed well bred and I showed him a room which he immediately took. He was alone.

The next morning, while he was at breakfast, I went up to his room with a servant girl, wishing to see for myself if he had all the qualities of order and neatness which I demand of my lodgers. At first I was very well satisfied; he had hung up his clothes in the closet and arranged his books carefully on the mantelpiece. When I examined the books, however, I was displeased. They were mostly novels, some even appearing to be translations from foreign languages; and I deplored the absence of the Scriptures. I augured no good from his choice of books and I resolved to keep my eye on him without his suspecting

it. He went up to his room a few minutes later and did not leave it, except for lunch and dinner, until the next day.

In the course of the afternoon I had occasion to go up to the third story, and as I passed before Mr. O'Donovan's door a sound of conversation stopped me. Ordinarily I am busy sewing in a small room on the ground floor. From the window where I sit I have a full view of the garden gate and consequently of everyone who goes in and out. Now as no one had come in that day I concluded that Mr. O'Donovan was talking to himself and I listened to hear what he was saying. He talked too low for me to be able to understand everything, but, judging from the tone in which he made certain remarks, I understood he was reproaching himself for some mistake which he had made. I noticed that he did not move about at all, which is not usual in people who talk to themselves. Who doesn't know that they like to walk up and down as they talk? After a few minutes he became silent and I went up to the third floor, not without regretting that I had taken in a stranger whose manners seemed so peculiar.

The next morning he went out rather early, dressed more carefully than the first day. I chose this moment to go up again to his room. I confess that I am especially afraid that some one through carelessness may set fire to my house. This fear never leaves me and it has become a sort of obsession since I began

to rent rooms to students. I distrusted him more than anyone I had had up to that time. But his room was in order; I saw even with surprise that he had made his bed, a thing I did not ask. I smelled no odor of smoke and I was on the point of going out when, looking about once more, I noticed that the books were no longer on the mantelpiece. Neither were they on the table, nor in the closet which I opened; and I was wondering what the young man could have done with them when I suddenly discovered them in a pile on the hearth. For a moment I was astounded. Evidently Mr. O'Donovan's intention was to get rid of his books by burning them, but why had he brought them with him if it was to destroy them the day after he arrived? I had, however, too many prejudices against them not to approve such a plan and, after a moment's reflection, I resolved to lend a hand. So I went myself and got an armful of brushwood and laid it on the hearth. Then, opening the draft and the window, I set fire to the twigs. Almost immediately everything flamed up. I closed the draft and returned to my work after sending the servant to sweep up the room.

A half an hour later I saw Mr. O'Donovan returning. He was walking fast and entered the house almost on the run. When the door of his room closed behind him I could not resist the temptation to follow him upstairs and, taking up my post of the day before, I listened intently. To my great surprise the

young man said nothing for quite a while. I heard him take a few steps and then stop and remain motionless. I was afraid myself to make a movement, for fear he would hear me. Suddenly he said a few words I did not understand, in a voice so changed and so peculiar that I was seized with a strange anxiety and I went downstairs as quietly as possible. When I took up my work again I noticed that my hands were trembling.

Everything led me to believe that the young man was crazy and I conceived immediately a horrible fear of him. I mastered it and did not allow it to appear, but that very afternoon I went to see my cousin, Thomas Thornton. You know that he is a professor of law and it would be difficult to find anyone who could give better advice. I told him the whole story. He listened in silence to the end and then gave me his conclusions. Without being able to say that young O'Donovan had absolutely lost his mind, he thought it possible to believe that he was suffering from a great mental disturbance and that, in any case, it was best to watch him. Then I begged him urgently to come and spend the evening with me and to observe Daniel O'Donovan while he was at the table, a thing which I had not been able to do myself, since I am busy in the kitchen when my boarders are eating. My cousin hesitated a moment and then acquiesced. We decided . . .

(I interrupt here the MS. of Eliza Smyth to give

the story of Dr. Thornton, which seems more complete and more definite.)

IV

FAIRFAX, *September, 1895.*

When my cousin explained to me the reason for her visit, I wondered if the case were really as grave as she thought and if it were worth while troubling my friend Dr. Dashwood, as she asked me to do. To quiet her, however, for she seemed agitated, I accompanied her home and I promised I would spend the whole evening observing personally young Daniel O'Donovan. I have had dealings with many people in the course of my career and I flattered myself that I could discover without difficulty the germ of mental trouble from which the young man was suffering. You will see if I succeeded.

It was about five o'clock when we arrived at the house. She wanted me to go upstairs at once and listen at his door. I do not like to do that sort of thing, but my cousin was so insistent that I had to yield and we went up together to the second floor. I remained there some moments without hearing anything and, taking it for granted that the young man was busy reading, I told my cousin that I was going downstairs and asked her to prepare me some tea. She followed me.

While she was in the kitchen I sat down in the dining-room in a chair beside the stove and, taking a

book out of my pocket, commenced to read. Miss Smyth returned after a quarter of an hour with a tray which she put upon the table. She looked disturbed and said to me in a low tone:

“I think I hear some one coming downstairs. If it is he and he wants to speak to me, you must remain with me.”

I pointed out that her idea was bad. Would he not be embarrassed at seeing me? She must see him alone, but I must also hear what he had to say. She agreed and went out quickly without closing the door, so that nothing said in the next room would escape me. I should have said before that that room faces the garden and has one door leading into the dining-room and another leading into the hall. That is where my cousin works and where she receives. It is not exactly a parlor, but, as you see, serves as one.

When she had gone I finally heard the steps which her keener ear had caught some moments before; but they passed unhesitatingly before the room where she was and continued toward the door. I went rapidly to the window which commands a view of the gate and the path and I saw the young man in question appear. He was rather tall and held himself badly. He went down the path toward the gate, his head bowed and his hands in his pockets, and all of a sudden he started back to the house. Then I saw his face. It struck me, I should say more exactly it shocked me, as if it had been unbearably ugly. Nevertheless, it was not. He only looked very much

disturbed. So I cannot explain my surprise and agitation when I saw him coming back; perhaps there was something else in his expression. I heard my cousin give a cry:

“Good Lord! Tom,” she said, “look at that face!”

I heard Daniel come back up the front steps, enter the house, and knock after a moment at my cousin’s door. He entered. I went back noiselessly to my place beside the stove and I heard the following conversation. Daniel O’Donovan talked with an assured air, but I could tell that the tone was not habitual and must cost him an effort.

He began by explaining that, as a result of unfortunate circumstances, he had lost his money. Then he stopped. There was a moment of silence and then I heard my cousin say:

“I hope, sir, that you have not lost it playing cards.”

He answered quickly:

“No. I have never played cards in my life. It was stolen.”

“It was stolen? Are you sure?”

“Yes. I am sure.”

“Do you know the thief?”

“Yes, but I should rather not talk of him, if you do not mind.”

“Then, sir,” said my cousin, somewhat more coldly, “what do you wish to say to me?”

Then he began to speak so rapidly and so indistinctly that my cousin had to interrupt every now

and then and make him repeat certain things. Perhaps she was afraid that I would not understand and, as a matter of fact, I did not get anything he said. I finally gathered from my cousin's replies that he was asking her to take him not as a student to whom a room is rented, but as a servant whom one lodges and boards. This proposal seemed so singular to me that I could not help giving an exclamation, but I do not think that they heard me. My cousin was silent. I guess that she felt the same astonishment that I did and could not for the moment think of any suitable reply.

She finally told Daniel O'Donovan that she would think it over and he went out. He had scarcely closed the door before she was once more in the dining-room.

"Well, cousin, did you hear what he said?" she asked. "What am I to do?"

We talked the question over for some time. Upon closer examination Daniel O'Donovan's request did not seem so unreasonable. My cousin was the only person he knew here. Was it not natural that he should confide in her? I suggested that he could have undoubtedly written to his relatives, but that he evidently preferred not to call upon them for financial aid. That was something in his favor. His ingenuousness appeared in his belief that he could combine the duties of servant and student. It was best not to discourage him as yet. He was so young; he would be discouraged soon enough.

My cousin yielded to my reasoning, but I felt that she did it with a certain reserve; she did not like O'Donovan. Nor did I; I did not like his eyes and a certain light I had seen in them. He had the crafty and evasive manner of a person who is going to commit an evil deed. But I did not want to be unjust. If I had not seen him in the garden, if I had only heard the conversation with my cousin, I should have had a good impression of him, for his voice inspired confidence. So I said nothing of this feeling and I advised my cousin to tell the young man that she would employ him, for example, in serving at table, and that he would not have to pay for his meals or for his room. I do not have to tell you that my cousin did not need any additional servant because she already had two girls to help her with the work; but she consented, out of charity, to try Daniel. I took it upon myself to find a position for him in the town in the office of a lawyer friend of mine. Meanwhile I was curious to see how he would do in the work which he had taken upon himself.

My cousin wrote him a little note and slipped it under his door. That same evening Daniel came down to the kitchen. I have not mentioned that three boarders had come the day before. They were all young men of Daniel's age, but as gay as he seemed grave. One of them was superior to the others in that kind of facile and sarcastic wit which is often seen in boys from this part of the country. He was taller than his comrades and he spoke to them with a sort

of mock authority which he ended by taking seriously himself; for he saw that he was listened to with a certain admiration and that they never failed to echo his laughter or to applaud his jokes. I had occasion to observe this the day of my arrival while we were sitting at the table waiting for dinner.

I had the fine talker at my right. At my left was a lady dressed in black, a large shawl over her shoulders, with the ends crossed upon her breast. Her gray hair was parted in the middle and drawn down tightly on each side of her forehead; her features were extremely severe. She did not say a word, but I noticed that her lips moved silently. Beside her sat a much younger woman who appeared to be a relation, perhaps her daughter or her niece. She seemed almost as serious as her companion, in spite of the grace and gentleness of her expression. She wore her hair most simply and most modestly, but she could not prevent the thick curls from falling about her temples when she bowed her head, a thing which happened often, for she seemed timid.

There were, then, six of us at the table the day Daniel began to work. When he first came in he was preceded by a young negress carrying an enormous platter and apparently making a great effort not to laugh. I noticed that he was paler than I first thought. In his arms he had a pile of plates that he began to distribute to us, his hands trembling as if it were taxing his strength.

At this moment the servant left the room. Daniel,

who had been all around the table, returned to me and offered me the dish of meat. I confess I made a gesture of impatience. I could not stand the distracted look the young man cast about him. The three students began to laugh. I took the dish from him and said to him in a low voice:

“Go and sit down. We will pass the dishes ourselves.”

He obeyed me silently and sat down in a chair near the door where I could observe him at my ease. He seemed so agitated that I could hardly restrain a feeling of pity; but, after all, was he doing anything particularly humiliating? I had worked as a waiter at Haymarket College, and that was much worse than this.

I pass rapidly over the two following days. I took all my meals at my cousin's. Daniel seemed to get accustomed to the work, but he was absent-minded and, when he was not busy, he would gaze out of the window as if he were watching for some one. I was the only one who paid any attention to him. I guessed that the students did not like him particularly; they affected not to look at him when they asked him to get them bread or water. As for the two women, they kept their eyes lowered all the time and never exchanged a word.

I come now to the most interesting part of this whole affair. The evening of the third day Daniel seemed anxious. I saw him frown as he looked out the window. It was dark; the moon was not yet up.

My neighbor laughed less than he did the first day and his two companions seemed to have lost their gaiety. I was glad for Daniel's sake, for they might easily have made fun of his strange manner and that absent expression with which he looked at us when we asked him for something.

We had almost finished dinner and Daniel was sitting in a chair near the kitchen door, his usual place. I did not take my eyes off him, but he did not seem to notice it. His gaze was fixed upon the door of that little room I have spoken of, the one which communicated with the hall. I wanted to ask him what he was watching so attentively when I perceived that he was talking to himself. His lips were moving very rapidly and I heard a sort of murmur. I was not the only one who heard it. The student beside me was looking at him with an alarmed expression; the younger of the two women was watching him also, but calmly, with not the slightest surprise. Her black eyes were gentle and serene.

Suddenly Daniel rose and went toward the door at which he had been gazing so continually. He walked slowly, as if every step cost him an effort. I do not know why I felt so moved, but it seemed as if he would never get to that door, as if he were going to fall. Finally he put his hand on the knob, turned it quickly, and went out. Once on the porch, he began to run. I heard the gate bang.

I think I rose. I was struck dumb with astonish-

ment. Looking at my neighbor, the elder of the two women, I saw that she was a prey to the same emotion.

"What do you think is taking place in that young man's mind?" I asked when I could finally speak.

"If he had not had so singular an expression when he left," she replied, "I should have thought that he had made a mistake in the door. But he went out the gate."

"He is crazy," the student next to me said then. "I am sure of it."

"Then we should go after him and bring him back," said the elderly lady, rising.

The younger woman, much flushed, had risen in her turn. She said in a low voice:

"That is useless."

"Why?" the other woman and I asked at the same time.

She then made this astonishing remark:

"Because he has fallen into hands more powerful than ours. He is already far away and you will never be able to reach him."

I sat down trembling. I knew only too well that the woman was right and that Daniel was running to his ruin or his salvation without the possibility of any earthly power turning him from his goal. It was not raining and the moon was rising; a pale light illumined the road. The young men had left at the beginning of the conversation, saying that they would find Daniel easily. At this moment my cousin appeared, attracted by the excitement. I ex-

plained to her in a few words what had happened. She looked at us for a moment without saying anything; then she put on a shawl and went out. I saw her go down the path and open the gate. She remained for a moment in the street . . . [etc.]

V

FRAGMENT OF A LETTER OF MISS G., PUBLISHED
LATER.

. . . I am sending you by this mail the last number of the *Fairfax Journal*, which I know will interest you. Did you ever hear of a more singular story than young O'Donovan's? I feel that he could have been spared his horrible death and I am not among those who believe in the supernatural explanations which are being given. I think simply that he was a victim of an attack of the most ordinary kind of fever and that it was criminal not to have watched him more carefully. My brother does not agree with me. He has kept in touch with the whole affair and he believes that Daniel O'Donovan, as he says, was touched by grace; but, he adds, this grace often acts according to the character of the person who receives it. It converts the gentle by persuasion; it strikes down the proud and the violent. In the soul of this demented young man it probably acted—do I dare to write it? but it is his opinion, not mine—madly or wisely, according as one takes the *worldly* or the *religious* point of view. He says also that this

early death is a blessing and that it ends at a good moment a life of uncertainty and spiritual misery. How ferocious intellectual men are! That is an argument which will make you shudder, but you know my brother is something of a *latitudinarian* and I should wager that the Church is not of the same opinion upon this question of grace. Of course you will not mention what I have written.

Aren't you surprised at my little sermon? You did not suspect that your old friend was dipping into theology like a regular Presbyterian. Now for the positive facts which I have learned about young Daniel. . . . But first of all, did I tell you that I knew his aunt before she was married? The poor woman made a very unfortunate marriage. Could you believe that she married a Northerner and that only two years before the War? He was a Mr. Drayton of New York. During the War they lived in Europe and in 1867 they returned to Savannah as if nothing had happened. I hear, however, that he never appears in public. I don't know what interest he has in that town.

But to return to his nephew. He wrote that he met my brother on the street one morning last month, but my brother never goes out except in the afternoon and in addition he is the only clergyman in the district. The young man must then have imagined a good part of the walk he writes about. That weakens his whole story, for if that is not true, none of the rest may be, either. Also, it is certain that the person

he calls Paul is merely the creation of a disordered mind, for the people who knew Daniel O'Donovan are agreed that he was always alone. But that is not the most astonishing part of the story. You probably know that the poor fellow thought one day that he received a letter from the person he called Paul; I say *thought*, because in reality he had written it himself without realizing what he was doing. Isn't that what is called *automatic writing*? In any case, you understand much more than I do about the psychological bases of this strange (you will agree with me) this ugly story, . . . [etc.].

THE END

❖

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